THE OFFICIAL GAMES MAGAZINE OF BEST BUY®

ISSUE 032 | SEPTEMBER 2013

@GAMER

READY TO RACE?

A slew of tire squealers are coming this year. Which ones will rev your engine?
PG. 56

$180 WORTH OF COUPONS!

$20 off Remember Me & $20 off Transformers Prime: The Game!
PG. 23

BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS

HE'S LEANER, HE'S MEANER, BUT IS HE BETTER? PG. 40

New Games Fight for Your Attention

REVIEWS: Splinter Cell Blacklist, Saints Row IV, Madden 25 PG. 61

@GAMER's Guide to Getting Out Alive

FEATURE: Videogames teach you vital lessons for survival PG. 50

Prime Titles to Add to Your Wish List

PREVIEWS: Assassin's Creed IV, WWE 2K14, Battlefield 4 PG. 16

The Elder Scrolls

ANTHOLOGY

❖

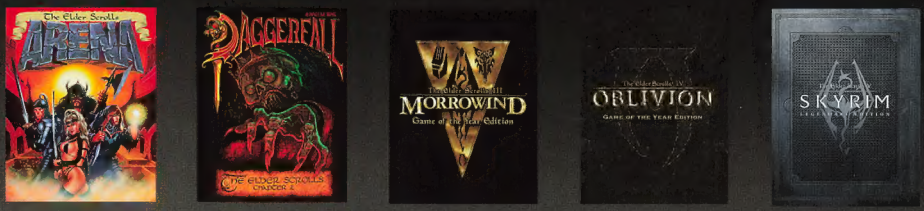
THE ELDER SCROLLS® SAGA

NEW DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT

NOW AVAILABLE AS A COMPLETE PC COLLECTION

9·10·13

❖



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TEEN to MATURE 17+ ™

T-M

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Sexual Themes
Use of Alcohol
Language

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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Limited edition faux leather style box set decorated with in-game artwork

All five games plus all
Game of the Year add-ons

Detailed physical map
for each game

In this ISSUE 32

THE OFFICIAL GAMES MAGAZINE OF BEST BUY®
ISSUE 032 SEPTEMBER 2013
@GAMER
READY TO RACE?
$180 WORTH OF COUPONS!
BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS
HE'S LEANER, HE'S MEANER, BUT IS HE BETTER? PG. 60
New Games Fight for Your Attention
@GAMER's Guide to Getting Out Alive
Prime Titles to Add to Your Wish List

40 BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS
We don the cowl and explore the Origins of the bat in this year's prequel to Arkham Asylum.

COVER STORY

50 HOW I SURVIVED THE APOCALYPSE
There are a hundred ways for it to happen, so it's time we find out just how much survival training videogames have given us.

START YOUR ENGINES
Buckle up. We're shifting into fifth gear to cover some of this year's fastest games. Simulation drifters, arcade drafters, and everything in between, this is the best the racing genre has to offer us in 2013...

56

88 GEAR
The first generation of Kickstarter projects have arrived, with the highly anticipated Ouya gaming console among them. Was this Android-based platform worth the wait?

Previews

16 Assassin's Creed IV Black Flag
Pirates and assassins go together like peanut butter and tuna. Wait, you guys don't eat peanut butter and tuna?

20 Battlefield 4
How did *Battlefield* pack in even more destruction? You're about to find out.

26 WWE 2K14
Can you smell what 2K Games is cooking? You can? Uh-oh. Call 911.

28 Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze
Nintendo's Great Ape got a facelift and, boy, does it look good.

30 Killzone: Shadow Fall
Vekta City is under siege and there's only one person for the job...you!

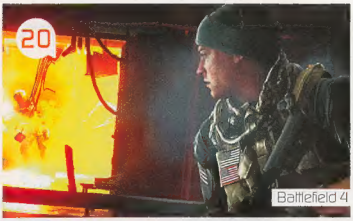
32 Bayonetta 2
Fluent in style, acrobatics, and gunplay, Bayonetta sure knows how to bring the pain while looking great.

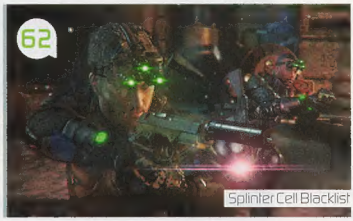
34 Ryse: Son of Rome
We're not history experts, but we're pretty sure *Ryse* took a few liberties with the Pax Romana era.

36 Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z
Most ninja don't overcome death to take revenge on their shadowy killer. Yaiba isn't like most ninja.

38 Project Spark
Have a great game idea? *Project Spark* is here to make it a reality.

39 Crimson Dragon
How did you tame a dragon? Why is it shooting lightning? These are great questions, but...*DRAGONS*!





NEWS: FIRST TO KNOW

04 STAFF
Who runs this jungle, anyway?

06 BLIPS
All the news that's fit to blip!

10 TABLET GAMES
You've got a tablet. We've got gaming expertise on tap.

12 CALENDAR
Release dates? Hey, we thought you'd never ask!

Top Picks

SPLINTER CELL BLACKLIST 62
In *Blacklist*, it's hunt or be hunted.

SAINTS ROW IV 66
As President, the fate of America is in your (slightly destructive) hands.

MADDEN NFL 25 70
Madden turns 25 this year. Its birthday gift? An all-new game!

PIKMIN 3 72
Three explorers, one planet, and a whole lot of Pikmin.

THE BUREAU: XCOM DECLASSIFIED 74
A third-person shooter set in the *XCOM* world? We want to believe.

TALES OF XILLIA 76
Looking for a new 40-plus hour obsession? *Tales of Xillia* is it.

MARIO & LUIGI: DREAM TEAM 77
Pillow talk with your favorite bros.

KILLER IS DEAD 78
Suda51 digs *007*. Who knew?

PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES 2 79
The adorable war between animate vegetation and the undead rages on.

MINI-REVIEWS! 80
Kingdom Hearts HD Remix, Dragon's Crown, Payday 2, Shin Megami Tensei IV, Phineas and Ferb: Quest for Cool Stuff, Metal Gear Solid: The Legacy Collection, The Smurfs 2, LEGO Legends of Chima: Laval's Journey, Civilization V: Brave New World

DOWNLOAD DIGEST 84
The low-key lowdown on the best add-ons, episodes, and tiny titles.

MEET THE STAFF

Charlie Barratt
Executive Editor
Batman: Arkham City is in Charlie's top 10 games of all time. Guess who wrote our *Origins* cover story...

Nick Pino
Associate Editor
Nick's first summer in SF was just as cold as his last winter in Buffalo. Kid can't catch a break!

Jenny Esdaile
Art Director
Jenny recently vacationed in Vegas. In other news, Jenny is now accepting charitable donations.

Jillian Lungaro
Associate Art Director
Thanks to Jillian, @GAMER's Facebook page is now a colorful, interactive wonderland. "Like" us!

Letter from the EDITOR

WELCOME TO @GAMER

Here we are, a couple of months from two new game consoles being launched, and there are still some great games to be had for the "old" platforms.

In the past, it's been common for the game publishers to "dump" their last (read: weak) software releases for the current consoles with light sales expectations, while shifting their high-profile games to the new platforms. But the current-generation consoles—which are going on seven and eight years since their initial release—are still quite capable, and they're in millions of homes. That's why you're seeing some fantastic games (such as *Assassin's Creed IV Black Flag*) announced for both the current systems and the new ones.

Of course, if you need help sorting through the new games for the best ones to buy, we're here for you. Thanks for reading @GAMER!

Andy Eddy
Editor-in-Chief

@GAMER XTRA
If you were reading *@GAMER*'s digital edition, you'd be able to listen to an audio message from Andy Eddy in this tag.

Staff_

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If series like Mario, Zelda, Metroid, and Castlevania can stand the test of time and make great games in a 3D environment, why can't we get a next-gen Mega Man already? Has Capcom given up on the future of the blue bomber?

—Brian U. via Facebook

ED: Thanks for the question, Brian. The answer you're about to hear is going to be a bit painful, so you may want to sit down. The reason Mega Man hasn't come to the third dimension is because, honestly, the game's tenets of lightning-quick reflexes, diabolical platforming sequences, and claustrophobic boss fights just wouldn't make for a great 3D game. Remember Mega Man Legends? We're not saying it's not something that we'd want or even that it can't happen down the road, but right now we can understand Capcom's motivation to leave the Blue Bomber right where he belongs, in 2D.

You should add more *Minecraft* in @GAMER! You could include some tips for starters, awesome skins, and a contest on the best house, building, base, etc. Also, [your articles] should have information on new updates, and some important recipies. What about featuring the best texture packs and mods, and servers? There's just so much for you guys to cover!

—Austin M. via email

ED: Woah, that's a lot of Minecraft! Don't get us wrong, Austin, we like building bases and crafting armor as much as the next gaming magazine. But if we gave all of our pages to Minecraft, then how could we get you all the latest on the caped crusader in Batman: Arkham Origins (pg. 40) or our review of Splinter Cell Blacklist (pg. 60)? Truth is, we'd love to get you all the latest on the one game you're really passionate about, but the best part of being a gamer is that the next Minecraft is just around the corner...and we want to cover that for you, too.

Hello! I have a question: Why did you stop selling the hard cover copies of @GAMER? I went to Best Buy to re-subscribe to the magazine and when I got to the store, one of the Blue Shirts told me that @GAMER has gone digital-only and have stopped making magazines. Why did you go digital and stop selling hardcover magazines?

—R. R. via Facebook

ED: We've been getting this question a lot lately, and so in addition to replying to you guys individually, we'll run a copy of our answer here. To put it simply, there's a lot of overhead to printing a physical magazine. There's a printer involved and delivery fees, not to mention all the unsold copies that go to waste at the end of the month. But we've got something better: the @GAMER digital edition. With our digital edition, we can get you additional screen galleries, interviews, audio clips, in-game footage, and so much more, all powered by the magic of the information age. We know change is tough, but trust that the same awesome content (and coupons) that you expect will still be there waiting for you in your inbox.

I love [@GAMER] so much.

—@CASSIEGOTTO via Twitter

ED: Then why don't you marry it? On second thought, @GAMER's not a one-woman kind of magazine, Cassie. If you love it, you've got to let it be free. (Plus, the laws about marrying an inanimate object may make this a little challenging...trust us.)

GAMING TRENDS, 140 CHARACTERS AT A TIME

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ANDY EDDY TWITTER: @VIDGAMES

Not sure why there's surprise about reports of Mattrick going to Zynga from MS. Zynga needs help, and he has the experience.

CHARLIE BARRATT TWITTER: @CHARLIEBARRATT

My game review of *Pacific Rim* the movie. Story and characters: 5 out of 10. Graphics and gameplay: 1,000 OUT OF 10. (Also, accents!)

NICK PINO TWITTER: @PEENDADDY

But seriously, Froggers are the worst "frogs" ever. They can't even swim! And what's going on with that engineering nightmare of a road?

@GAMER XTRA

If you were reading *@GAMER*'s digital edition, you'd be able to listen to our podcast right here.

BEST BUY CUSTOMER REVIEWS & RATINGS

WANT TO HAVE YOUR SAY?

What are you playing? Do you like it? Do you hate it? Let other @GAMER readers know what you think—send in a 50- to 100-word review to reviews@atgamermagazine.com, and we'll post 'em in each issue.

Submit your review to:
reviews@atgamermagazine.com

STAR TREK

This non-sequel to the movie delivers hard-hitting action and decent character and weapon customization that give Spock or Kirk a unique play style in this "final frontier" game. With the ability to switch between characters at any time, you can experience playing the logical Spock or the gung-ho Kirk. Either way, you will love the game all sci-fi nerds have been waiting for.

Score: 4/5

—Jennifer Hewey

Welcome to 2013, where tablets and smartphones enable you to take your information anywhere. It's also where you'll find the digital version of @GAMER, which is chock full of extra content, such as screenshots and streamed game trailers. Test drive it at atgamermagazine.com or convert your subscription by clicking on the Customer Service link at the bottom of the page. We don't want you to miss a thing!

Blips...

News, rumors, and game culture deconstructed

NEWS BITES

SAINTS ROW IV's newly announced season pass will include the previously unreleased *Saints Row 3* DLC, "Enter the Dominatrix," and cost $9.99.

THE LEGO MOVIE will bring back '90s stop-motion video when the movie (and accompanying videogame) comes out in early 2014.

LOOKING OUT FOR THE LITTLE GUYS

MICROSOFT TO ALLOW INDIE DEVELOPERS TO "SELF-PUBLISH"

The future is looking quite bright for indie developers eager to publish titles on Microsoft's next-gen console if a recent update from Xbox Chief Product Officer Marc Whitten is to be believed. In a statement sent to @GAMER, he told us, "Our vision is that every person can be a creator. That every Xbox One can be used for development. That every game and experience can take advantage of all of the features of Xbox One and Xbox LIVE. This means self-publishing. This means Kinect, the cloud, achievements. This means great discoverability on Xbox LIVE."

Previously, indie developers only had access to the Xbox Live Indie Games Channel (XBLIG) as a digital storefront and needed access to a difficult-to-get Xbox 360 development kit if they didn't want to be published by the first-party giant. We can only hope that this move is the first of many in an attempt to change the anti-indie climate that has long plagued Microsoft's system.

The @GAMER Knowledge Check

FROM OFF THE PODCAST AND ONTO THE PAGE!

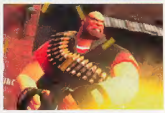
In a November 1994 *Famitsu* article, Nintendo creative Shigeru Miyamoto went on record to say that this title was the first role-playing game he had ever beaten on his own. What game was he referring to?

Answer: *Mother 2*...er, *Earthbound* as it's known here in America.

THE RAPTR REPORT

What are the hottest games being played by Xbox 360 and PC gamers? Raptr.com has the answer.

TEAM FORTRESS 2



1	CoD: Black Ops II
2	League of Legends
3	Rift
4	DOTA 2
5	World of Warcraft
6	Borderlands 2
7	Minecraft
8	Battlefield 3
9	The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
10	Team Fortress 2
11	FIFA Soccer 13
12	Warframe
13	Guild Wars 2
14	Halo 4
15	Civilization V NEW

WARFRAME

LOOK OUT!

STRIDER TO GET AN HD REVAMP ON XBOX ONE

Fans of fast-paced '80s arcade action will be pleased to know that Capcom is planning an HD revamp of 1989's side-scroller *Strider* with help from *Killer Instinct* developer Double Helix.

HIT THE STREET

NINTENDO 3DS' STREETPASS Mii PLAZA GETS FOUR NEW DOWNLOADABLE GAMES

What do flowers, ships, ghosts, and ancient warlords have in common? All feature as the subjects of a new generation of StreetPass! Each Mii-powered minigame runs $4.99, or you can buy them together for $14.99. *Mii Force* is a Gradius-like shoot-em-up, *Flower Town* is a gardening sim, *Warrior's Way* is a rock-paper-scissors strategy game, and *Monster Manor* is a spooky hybrid of Tetris-like puzzles and *Final Fantasy*-style combat.

DON'T FORGET THE POLYETHYLENE!

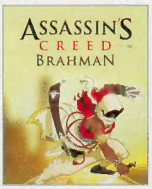
A WEEK OF INK

While pictures of cosplayers and movie stars stole most of the San Diego Comic-Con spotlight this year, we were more excited to see some of our favorite franchises getting the ink-and-panel treatment courtesy of Dark Horse Comics and Ubisoft's publishing house, Ubi Workshop.

HALO: ESCALATION

Making the jump from the Marvel-published side of a comic-book store to the Dark Horse aisle, the *Halo* series is finally going to get its own monthly comic fleshing out the events of *Halo 4*. *Halo: Escalation* won't star the Chief and instead follows the crew of the UNSC Infinity on a diplomatic mission between the warrior-turned-leader Arbiter and savage Brutes.

ASSASSIN'S CREED: BRAHMAN



Jerusalem, Rome, Boston, Kingston, and now 18th-century India. *Assassin's Creed: Brahman* will follow a new assassin, named Arbaaz Mir, as he copes to deal with "the iron grip of British colonial rule" in a historic time of turmoil, and will be brought to life by DC's award-winning author, Brenden Fletcher.

Five Questions with...

CLAIM TO FAME... Voice of Solid Snake in the *Metal Gear Solid* series.

DAVID HAYTER

Professional Voice Actor and Screenwriter

1 How did you get into voice acting?
I did a Russian accent in an episode of *Major Dad* and a voiceover director named Gordon Hunt saw me, and hired me to do *Captain Planet*.

2 What's your favorite *Metal Gear* memory?
There's a lot! I think it was the time that Jennifer Hale's character Naomi was watching Snake undress after he'd gotten old, and she was crying, and she said, "Shriveled Snake!" just randomly.

3 Are you going to miss the role, and will you play *Metal Gear Solid V*? [Konami recently announced that *24* star Kiefer Sutherland will voice Solid Snake for the next entry.]
Yeah, very much. [And] no. Why? Because it's too disturbing for me to hear somebody else doing the voice of a character that I played for 15 years. It's just—I don't think I would enjoy that.

4 You wrote the screenplays for the *X-Men* movies and *Watchmen*. Have you considered writing scripts for games?
I'm actually talking to some companies right now about possibly writing/producing a game that we can then spin off into movies and television. Because I've got sort of a footprint in both worlds, I think it's a natural next step.

5 You're a director now as well. Do you care to make the first great game-to-movie adaptation?
Is there one that's even good? I enjoy the *Resident Evil* movies, but they're different from the games, and a true adaptation should give you the same experience, just in a different format. So, yes, I would love to make the first—or I would love to make the greatest game-to-movie adaptation.

Blips...

More news, rumors, and game culture deconstructed

BATMAN CHARACTER EVOLUTION

BATMAN (NES)
Though it wasn't Bats' first foray into the digital realm, it was certainly one of the most iconic.

BATMAN RETURNS
Batman Returns taught us that almost every problem in life could be solved by bashing a few skulls together.

BATMAN: DARK TOMORROW
Some Batman games are great, and some are called *Batman: Dark Tomorrow*.

LEGO BATMAN
LEGO Batman was proof that even the brooding caped crusader could be cute with a fresh coat of plastic.

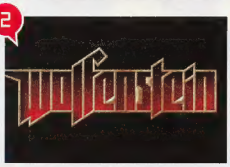
BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY
The *Arkham* series spawned dozens of clones, but none of them could hold a Bat Signal to the original.

MIX&MATCH

Bring out the big guns! Can you match the series with its iconic weapon?

1

2



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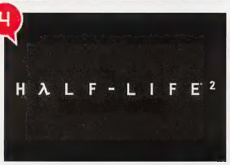
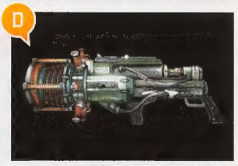


A

B

C

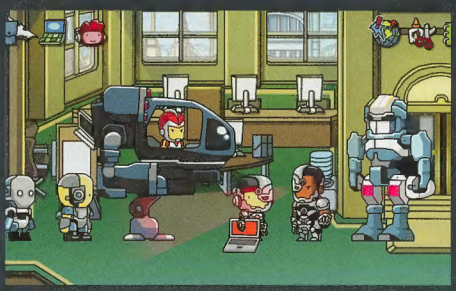
D

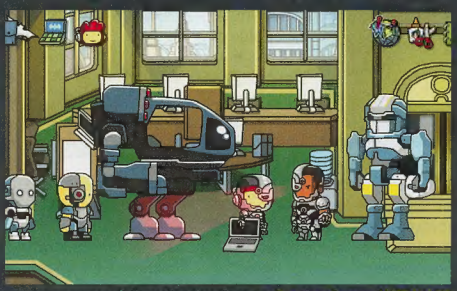


ANSWERS: 1-B, 2-D, 3-A, 4-C

DOUBLE TAKE

Find the 10 things that make these two pictures different!





For answers visit our facebook page: facebook.com/ATGAMER

Pre-Order Exclusives

Check out these special offers on upcoming games, available by pre-ordering now!

BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS

Publisher: Warner Bros.
Developer: WB Games Montreal
Release Date: Oct 25, 2013
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii U, PC

Pre-order *Arkham Origins* to unlock the deadly assassin, Deathstroke. You'll also receive two additional challenge maps that will put your sleuthing skills to the test.

BATTLEFIELD 4

Publisher: EA
Developer: DICE
Release Date: Oct 29, 2013
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

Get back in the battle with the China Rising DLC pack available by reserving a copy of *Battlefield 4* at Best Buy. With four massive maps and entirely new vehicles at your disposal, this is one mission you won't want to miss.

CALL OF DUTY: GHOSTS

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Infinity Ward
Release Date: Nov 5, 2013
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PS4, Xbox One, PC

Think the Tower of Terror is bad? Try a multiplayer match on Free Fall. But watch out: This pre-order exclusive map pack is only for soldiers who can handle heights.

WATCH_DOGS

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Release Date: Nov 19, 2013
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii U, PS4, Xbox One

Sure, hacking is pretty 1337, but if you really want to live on the edge you'll need the Breakthrough Pack. Pre-ordering nets you an exclusive single-player mission and the Vehicle Expert Perk.

Featured Game:

TABLET TACTICS

One of the best strategy games goes portable

XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN

Platforms:
$19.99, 2K Games, 2kgames.com

Last year's truly excellent turn-based strategy revival is just as impressive on the iPad, as *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* delivers nearly the entire console and PC experience on tablet at a fraction of the cost. In some ways, it's actually a better version. Not only is it cheaper and ultra portable, but the game is also incredibly well-suited for a touch interface; moving your alien-blasting soldiers around the battlefield is a breeze. The visuals are a bit simplified, multiplayer is still to come via an update, and the price tag may be intimidating for a tablet game, but this is an engrossing, triple-A-quality strategic epic that can be enjoyed anywhere. It's worth the scratch.

XCOM's grid interface is perfect for a touch screen.

▼ Psst! Look behind you.

LIMBO

Platforms:
$4.99, Playdead, limbogame.org

Another console favorite done brilliantly on the iPad, *Limbo* delivers a fantastic, atmospheric puzzle-platform experience within the shadowy unknown. As a young boy, you'll encounter various obstacles and enemies to overcome, but the game offers zero instruction or dialogue; amazingly, it rarely frustrates. The touch controls are subtle and effective, and the game is every bit as thrilling and powerful as on other platforms. It's a true tablet gem.

▼ Mickey's turn adds new twists.

WHERE'S MY MICKEY? XL

Platforms:
$1.99, Disney, disney.com

Spicing up Disney's familiar *Where's My Water?* Physics-puzzler formula, *Where's My Mickey?* inserts the iconic mouse with a slick retro aesthetic while also including cartoon cut-scenes and adding in a few new mechanics—such as clouds that can move liquid around and wind gusts that must be unleashed in myriad ways to solve stages. The XL tablet release also adds much larger bonus stages not seen in the phone version of the game.

▼ Cartoonish action with bite.

KINGDOM RUSH FRONTIERS HD

Platforms:
$4.99, Ironhide Game Studio, ironhidegames.com

The best tablet tower-defense game only gets better in *Kingdom Rush Frontiers HD*, which again finds you placing and significantly upgrading offensive towers to halt intruders from swarming your base. *Frontiers* serves up a bevy of new levels to conquer—some with unexpected environmental wild cards—not to mention more advanced upgrades. It's a large and challenging time sink that'll keep you coming back after each hard-fought defeat.

▼ Tables quickly grow in complexity.

SUPER PAPER POOL

Platforms:
$1.99, One Side Software, onesidesoftware.com

Taking cues from both billiards and miniature golf, *Super Paper Pool* delivers a series of stages that find you navigating a cue ball (with a stick) around closed-off levels to sink one or more pieces in their rightful hole. Later stages add hazards such as locked gates and spikes, making it more and more likely that you'll drop a dozen shots after hitting into a bad spot. It's lightly brainy, but amusing—like the games it's based on.

Wield your favorite characters' powers

HANDHELD HEROES

COMIC GAMES!

Tablets are not only an ideal place to read the exploits of your favorite comic-book heroes, but also to play through them. Several games based on beloved superheroes are available for iPad and Android tablets, and here are five of the most notable.

01 AVENGERS INITIATIVE
($1.99, marvel.com)
Clearly inspired by *Infinity Blade*, Marvel's *Avengers Initiative* serves up a series of melee duels that you can experience as either Hulk or Captain America, with myriad costumes serving as a perk for diehards.

02 THE DARK KNIGHT RISES
($6.99, gameloft.com)
Based on the last Batman flick, *The Dark Knight Rises* delivers an open-world jaunt through Gotham City that lets you take on dozens of missions, beat up baddies, and glide through the night sky with ease.

03 X-MEN
($0.99, konami.com)
Ported from the 1992 favorite, *X-Men*'s simple beat-em-up action hearkens back to a golden age of arcade gaming. It's shallow, but local four-player co-op is a plus, and the pixel graphics capture the comic feel.

04 INJUSTICE: GODS AMONG US
(free, injustice.com)
Like the recent console game, *Injustice* spotlights such DC Comics greats as Superman and Wonder Woman in brutal fights, though the iPad version offers tag-team battles and fighters earned via collectable cards.

05 IRON MAN 3
(free, gameloft.com)
This incredibly swift endless runner follows the ol' bucket head as he soars through cities, tasking you with dodging hazards, zapping enemies, and battling bosses. It's a solidly fun and very slick free option.

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 2013

It's National Be Kind To Editors & Writers Month! (Yes, seriously.)

■ Game Release Date ■ The @GAMER Podcast ■ This day in videogame history...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
01 @GAMER ISSUE 32 ON SALE	02 LABOR DAY	03 Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate; Diablo III (PS3, Xbox 360); LEGO Legends of Chima: Laval's Journey (Nintendo DS); Rayman Legends; Total War: Rome II	04	05	06	07
08	09	10 Killzone: Mercenary; Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 Remix; NHL 14; Puppeteer; Young Justice: Legacy	11	12	13 THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 72	14
15 The Wonderful 101	16	17 Grand Theft Auto V	18	19	20 Grand Theft Auto V	21
22	23 FIRST DAY OF FALL	24 Armored Core: Verdict Day; FIFA 14; Pro Evolution Soccer 2014; Scribblenauts Unmasked: A DC Comics Adventure	25	26	27 THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 73	28
29	30					

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	01 NBA 2K14	02	03	04	05	
06 @GAMER ISSUE 33 ON SALE	07	08 ▪ Beyond: Two Souls ▪ F1 2013 ▪ Just Dance 2014	09	10	11 THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 74	12 Pokémon X/Y
13 Skylanders Swap Force	14 COLUMBUS DAY	15 ▪ Jett Tailfin Racers ▪ Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm 3 BURST ▪ Power Rangers Megaforce ▪ Worms: The Revolution Collection	16 Batman Arkham Origins	17	18 SEE PAGE 40	19
20 LEGO Marvel Super Heroes	21	22 ▪ LEGO Marvel Super Heroes ▪ Rocksmith 2014 Edition ▪ Sonic Lost World	23	24	25 ▪ Batman: Arkham Origins ▪ Batman: Arkham Origins: Blackgate THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 75	26
27	28	29 ▪ Angry Birds Star Wars ▪ Assassin's Creed IV Black Flag ▪ Battlefield 4 ▪ Pac-Man and the Ghostly Adventures ▪ WWE 2K14	30	31 HALLOWEEN	NOVEMBER 2013 HIGHLIGHTS Call of Duty: Ghosts: Need for Speed Rivals: Watch_Dogs: Tearaway:	

9/15 Continued ■ Zumba Fitness: World Party

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RP-M

ESRB esrb.org

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@GAMER XTRA

In *@GAMER*'s digital edition, you could play a video showing segments from *Black Flag*'s main gameplay here.

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV BLACK FLAG

Ubisoft's interactive version of *Pirates of the Caribbean*? Words: Andy Eddy

If this band of scurvy curs starts walking toward you, turn and run...

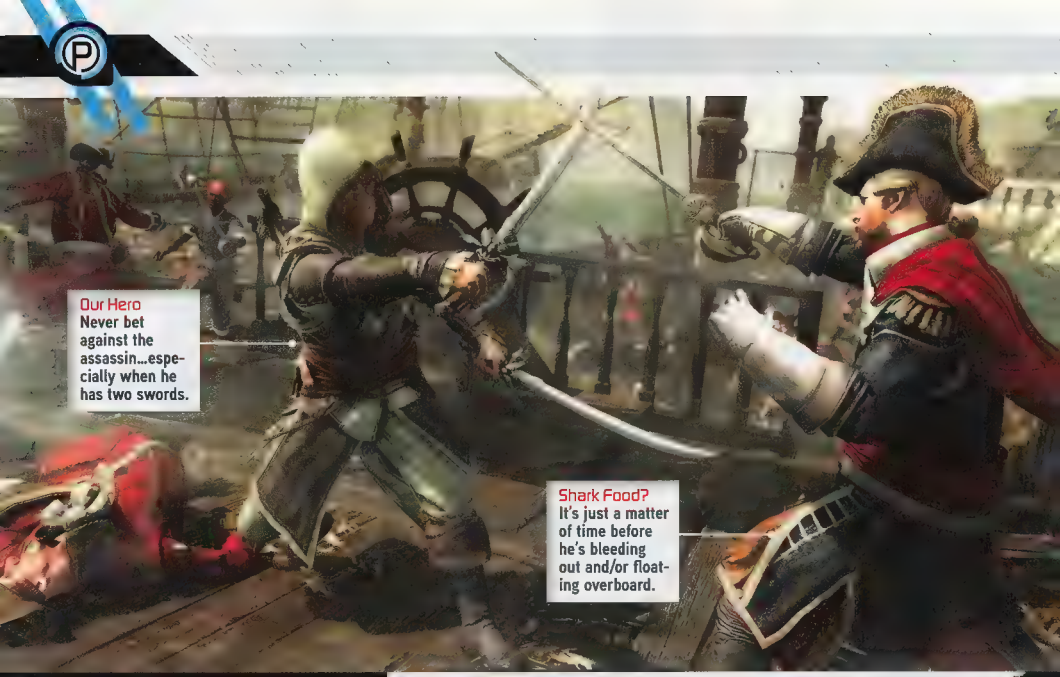
The makers of *Assassin's Creed IV Black Flag* are claiming that it will have the same depth of story as previous AC games, but it'll be much different in the sense that it's an open-world game that splits its adventures between solid ground and roiling ocean.

I traveled to Ubisoft's Singapore studio to get a first-hand look at what the team is creating (under the oversight of project leads in the Ubisoft Montreal studio), and it's highly ambitious. The Singapore team was responsible for the naval portion of *Assassin's Creed III*, and Ubisoft clearly felt the concept was strong enough to warrant a deeper dive (pun intended).

According to Arnaud Vaudour, the game's producer in Singapore, his team is seeking to make something "where you can go seamlessly from ground to sea and sea to ground."

"The main challenge was the integration of the land and the sea sections. When we built the naval experience in AC3," Vaudour said, "it was meant to be a separated experience, not integrated with the rest of the game. Here we had to reunify both the ground part of the game and the sea part of the game."

Indeed, my demo included big boat battles, spirited sorties against large sea creatures, and underwater adventuring with barrels set below the surface to replenish protagonist Edward Kenway's lungs. The game makers said there'll be a lot of activities and missions to keep us busy. I can't wait to see how Ubisoft is reshaping the *Assassin's Creed* series into something that could fairly be called *Grand Theft Boat*.


Our Hero
Never bet against the assassin...especially when he has two swords.
Shark Food?
It's just a matter of time before he's bleeding out and/or floating overboard.

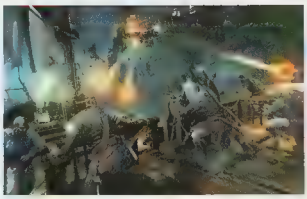
MODEL BEHAVIOR

Walking through the part of the Ubisoft Singapore studio that holds the *Black Flag* development team, it's easy to remember what's being worked on. Most of the floor-to-ceiling posts sport Abstergo Industries logos. One person rigged a lid over his desk that made it look like an open treasure chest. A few fairly large replica ship models sit in view of anyone who wants to check out a boat's shape, look over where the rigging lines go, or even just envision what it'd be like on the deck—perhaps during a fierce battle. I was told these touches keep the studio staff immersed in the "golden age of piracy."

SAILING AWAY \\

Ubisoft is integrating "second screen" content in many of its games, and *Black Flag* is no different. Your smartphone or tablet will be usable as a real-time map where you can plot waypoints and plan out expeditions to treasure map locations that'll update the in-game map. The best, though, is the "fleet metagame" that can be played with ships you capture—an activity that you can continue away from your console or PC, but which will earn the same resources you need in your main game.

DEATH COMES IN MANY FORMS



▲ Dodging enemy fire is a bit tougher at the helm of a giant ship.

▲ Close-quarters combat will still play a big part in *Assassin's Creed IV*.

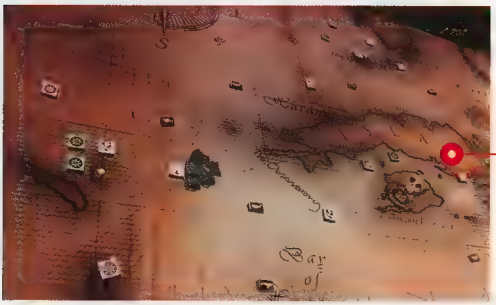
Executions in multiplayer matches are fast, frantic, deadly—and acrobatic.

BLADES WITH FRIENDS \\

Assassin's Creed's multiplayer has been polished to a near-blinding sheen over the past four years, with each game adding new complexities to the surprisingly fun competitive (and cooperative) offerings. Black Flag continues this series of iteration, introducing the Game Lab, a tool which lets you customize the rules of each match. You're able to change such aspects as Ability Cooldowns, Bonus Triggers, HUD elements, Match Length, and much more, altering the experience without really revamping the fundamentals. Sadly, naval battles won't be included in multiplayer—fighting with friends will be a landlocked affair.—*Hollander Cooper*

@GAMER XTRA

In *@GAMER*'s digital edition, a video showing samples of *Black Flag*'s multiplayer would be available right here.



TABLETOP GAMING

The Singapore studio also features a table with its shiny surface made up like a large map. It's a re-creation of the in-game map, with physical icons that represent where you'll find various encounters and objectives.

GAME DETAILS

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV BLACK FLAG

INFO
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal, Ubisoft Singapore
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii U, PS4, Xbox One, PC

RELEASE DATE
October 29, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8-player online

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Land lubbers who want to sail the open ocean

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

The pirate's life has never been more fun than in *Monkey Island*, available on PSN and XBLA.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Assassin's Creed IV Black Flag*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ This game is *big*
- ❤ Seamless transitions from ship to shore (and back again)
- ❤ Playing the fleet game on a tablet

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ I hope the naval action is more fun than in *AC3*
- ✖ Assassin *and* pirate?

BATTLEFIELD 4

Welcome to Architectural Warfare • Words: Nick Pino

Every first-person shooter series has a gimmick. For *Halo*, it's the sci-fi weaponry and exclusivity to the Xbox platform. For *Call of Duty*, it's the quick-trigger kills and spectacularly cinematic action sequences. But for *Battlefield*, it's always been about the multiplayer, above everything else: the 12-on-12 matches (16-on-16 if you're a PC player), the ease of jumping in and out of a diverse fleet of vehicles, and the gorgeous, impossibly large maps.

These elements are taken to an even greater extreme with *Battlefield 4*'s multiplayer. The map I recently sampled, "Siege of Shanghai," provided one of the most intense multiplayer matches I've ever had—a massive 32-on-32 Domination game set in a war-torn cityscape, skyscrapers and all. As in previous *Battlefield* games, you're allowed to spawn at any base your team has captured or on any vehicle with an open slot. By choosing the latter, I condemned myself to an early death, landing in a Humvee that was stuck directly in an opposing tank's line of fire. However, it didn't need to go down this way. *Battlefield 4* employs an improved spawning system that lets you "look before you leap," giving you a real-time view of the area where you'll appear before you make your pick.

In addition, the four main classes from *Battlefield 3* make a return: Assault, the group's heavy lifter and combat unit; Recon, a solitary sniper-type unit; Support, the wildcard wielding a light-machine gun; and Engineer, the maintainers/destroyers of your/your enemy's vehicles. The three factions are China, Russia, and the United States.

Though these classes and other familiar mechanics remain the same, it's the second-screen integration of Commander Mode (see the "Eye in the Sky" sidebar at right) and the reality-emulating Frostbite 3 engine that bring *Battlefield* into the next generation of gaming. After my match commander directed us to seize and bring down the map's central building, we watched in soot-covered awe as the entire 400,000-ton destructible skyscraper—the same one I'd just been standing inside of—crumbled to the ground. Now that's an impressive gimmick.

▼ Skirmishes in *Battlefield 4* are won and lost depending on who's calling the shots.

EYE IN THE SKY \\

Playing as your team's Commander is a lot of fun. By watching over the battlefield from above, you can direct squad leaders to key objectives and deploy artillery strikes or E.M.P. bursts to their immediate area, smoking out enemy armor and equipment. Plus, for the first time in Battlefield history, you'll be able to take control of this mode from any iOS or Android-powered device, in addition to on your console.

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT IT, BREAK IT \\

01 TIMBER!

Strategically placing C4 on the skyscraper's support beams will cause 400,000 tons of concrete and steel to come crashing down. After it blows, run.

02 WAVE RUNNER

I found more than helicopters and tanks at my base. Even the water's a battleground thanks to the inclusion of jet skis and attack boats. Sweet!

MEANWHILE... \\

What's new in Battlefield 4's campaign? The E3 trailer showed protagonist Recker and the rest of his *Bad Company*-esque crew infiltrating an enemy ship. Cue firefights and explosions until the ship splits in two, casting the squad into an awaiting attack boat with pursuit hot on their tail.

GAME DETAILS

BATTLEFIELD 4

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: EA DICE
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PS4, Xbox One, PC

RELEASE DATE
October 29, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 64-player online

GENRE
First-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Hardened virtual soldiers and those who need to go back to *Battlefield* boot camp

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Counter-Strike: Global Offensive offers a top-tier FPS fix for a reasonable price.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Battlefield 4*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Explosive, (extremely) large-scale combat
- So many vehicles to drive and destroy
- On the battlefield, Commanders are king

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- You'll spend a good deal of time looking at the respawn menu

PUSH START ON A WHOLE NEW LEVEL

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Remember Me
WWE '13

The fall can be a tough time to be a gamer. With so many great titles coming out every week, there's almost too much to play and not enough time in the day. While we can't help you turn back the clock an extra hour, we can get you some great deals on games, like $20 off *Remember Me*, or saving $10 on *WWE '13*.

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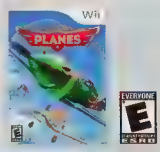
02 TRANSFORMERS PRIME: THE GAME

When Megatron and the Decepticons unleash a secret weapon upon planet Earth, it's up to you to put a stop to his plan and put evil in its place. Roll out as Optimus Prime and the rest of the Autobots, but prepare yourself—there's more to this than meets the eye.

03 WWE '13

It takes blood, sweat, and tears to become the best in the world. And if you want to rise to the top on your terms, you better bring the Attitude, and ignite a revolution. Relive the Attitude Era: Now, for the first time, explore to an unparalleled and groundbreaking era in WWE history.



04 DISNEY PLANES

Join the speed-loving crop duster Dusty on adventures through the air with fellow characters Ishani, Echo, and Bravo as you travel to 10 breathtaking, captivating environments inspired by the film. Take to the skies with a high-flying adventure in *Disney Planes*.

05 ANY PRE-OWNED GAME $29.99 OR ABOVE

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06 PULSE ELITE WIRELESS STEREO HEADSET

Every step on the battlefield is a risky one. Without knowing where your enemies are lurking, each move could be your last. Gain the upper hand in battle and stay a step ahead of your opponents with the Pulse Wireless Stereo Headset that allows you to hear their every move.

07 EAR FORCE XP400 WIRELESS HEADSET

Dive into exciting gameplay with the Turtle Beach Ear Force XP400 Wireless gaming headset that features 50mm speakers and Dolby Surround Sound for immersive 360° audio. Even personalize your listening experience with customizable bass/treble presets.

08 EAR FORCE N11 HEADSET - BLACK

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Arriving 9/15/13

T
TEEN
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Alcohol Reference
Animated Blood
Fantasy Violence
Suggestive Themes

Nintendo

Game and system sold separately.
*Add'l charges/agreements may be required for multiplayer. Internet service also required.
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ONLY ON Wii U

Boot to the Head
Shawn Michaels gets to hear some sweet chin music of his own.

USA! USA!
The Undertaker appears as his American Bad**** persona.

WWE 2K14

More evolution than revolution • Words: Chris Hoffman

The WWE license may have made the jump to publisher 2K from the now-defunct THQ, but grappling fans concerned about other seismic changes to the world's premiere wrestling series needn't worry; judging by what we've seen so far, the in-ring action of WWE 2K14 mostly sticks to a tried-and-true formula.

Like in previous games in the series, this year's edition lets you strap on the boots of superstars past and present (including John Cena, Stone Cold Steve Austin, the Ultimate Warrior, and Shawn Michaels) and lay the smackdown on opponents with a huge variety of strikes, grapples, submission holds, and death-defying aerial maneuvers. The game features the same engine as last year's WWE '13, but with numerous refinements, such as improved walking and running animations, an updated reversal system (you can no longer counter most reversals), and superstar voiceovers during gameplay. The game also adds more spectacular "OMG!" moments (including the ability to execute certain finishers, such as Ryback's Shell Shock, on two opponents at once) and allows some characters to launch foes into the air.

STRAP ON THE THE BOOTS OF SUPERSTARS PAST & PRESENT

That's to say nothing of the single-player campaign mode, however. WWE 2K14 promises to have one of the series' biggest character rosters to date, with stars from the '80s, the Attitude Era, and today, and I expect that the campaign mode will take advantage of that fact by incorporating different periods of WWE history.

If that's not enough to get you eager to step into the ring, then consider this: in addition to the standard game, 2K will also be releasing a special Phenom Edition of WWE 2K14, which includes a playable Undertaker in his American Bad*** attire, custom coffin packaging, the Undertaker's autograph, and more.

▲ THE SHOWOFF
Once hated by the fans, Dolph Ziggler has become a recent favorite, thanks to his amazing athleticism.

▲ OH YEAH! DIG IT!
The late, great Macho Man Randy Savage appears in the attire he wore at WresteMania III.

▲ DO YOU SMELL IT?
The Rock returned in a big way earlier this year when he reclaimed the WWE Championship.

HERE COMES THE PAIN

▲ What could hurt worse than being crushed by Randy Savage's flying elbow drop?

▲ Skull meets steel ringpost in one of *WWE 2K14*'s new "OMG!" moments.

ONE WARRIOR NATION

Back in the 1980s, few wrestlers were bigger and badder than the uncontrollable powerhouse known as the Ultimate Warrior. His meteoric rise to the top and defeat of Hulk Hogan at WrestleMania VI were nothing short of legendary. Despite appearing in titles such as *WWE All Stars* and *Legends of WrestleMania* in recent years, *WWE 2K14* marks Warrior's first appearance in a mainline WWE game since 1996.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS

WWE 2K14

INFO
Publisher: 2K
Developer: Yuke's
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
October 29, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Local and online

GENRE
Wrestling

SUITABLE FOR
The millions...and millions... of WWE's fans

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Current wrestlers and classic stars also collide in the arcade-like *WWE All Stars*.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *WWE 2K14*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Lots of little enhancements to the proven *WWE* formula
- ❤ A huge, diverse roster of characters

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Maybe too much like last year's game
- ✖ No next-gen version; PS3 and Xbox 360 only

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY: TROPICAL FREEZE

New enemies, new gameplay, same old necktie • Words: Matt Cabral

Fans of 2010's *Donkey Kong Country Returns* should feel right at home in the big ape's upcoming sequel. As in that well-received reboot on the original Wii, *Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze* tasks you with stomping baddies, gathering bananas, collecting puzzle clues, and platforming through some of the most vibrant and inventive levels this side of Mario and Luigi's Mushroom Kingdom.

While the follow-up doesn't stray far from the series' successful formula, the superior Wii U hardware is adding an extra coat of polish to the monkey business. The most obvious improvement is the HD visual presentation; *DKCR* was one of the prettiest titles to splash across Wii owners' screens, but *Tropical Freeze* manages to up the ante. Backgrounds sport much more detail, character models are crisper, and Donkey Kong's shiny coat looks almost as realistic as any you'll find bristling on a furry Pixar character.

IT CLEVERLY PLAYS WITH FOREGROUNDS AND BACKGROUNDS

More than just cleaning up Kong real good, the tech's also tweaking the side-scrolling gameplay. *Tropical Freeze* cleverly plays with foregrounds and backgrounds the way *DKCR* did, but a new dynamic camera adds another layer of immersion to the chest-pounding proceedings. Michael Kelbaugh, Retro Studios president and CEO, elaborates: "Where *DKCR* did a lot of front and back transitions, the dynamic camera takes advantage of all that real estate in the middle, turning it into real playable aspects of the game. It adds a lot of dimension, a lot of player value."

I got a tease of this when Kong was shot through a series of barrels snaking around a towering tree; rather than unfolding on a 2D plane, the scene's perspective shifts repeatedly as it winds around the rising trunk. Retro promises the visual trickery will also enhance the franchise's famed rocket-barrel and mine-cart sections, allowing you to "see things from a new perspective and have new experiences."

NEW FOES, OLD FRIENDS

Donkey Kong Country's chilly subtitle refers to an invasion by Vikings who, well, freeze the island paradise setting. Not content with run-of-the-mill Nordic warriors, however, the game features aquatic animals—walruses, penguins, seals—sporting horned helmets. Thankfully, you won't have to face them alone. In addition to Diddy returning in 2-player co-op, Dixie can also be recruited; her special skill sees her temporarily catching big air with her propeller-like ponytail.

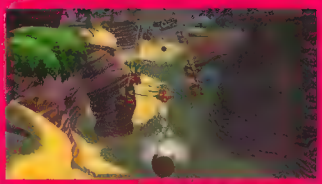
01 FOUL FOWL
These penguins defy their real-world counterparts by taking flight. Also, they're Vikings.

02 WING CHIMP
The platforming hero promises to be just as challenging as in *DKCR*. Better bring a buddy along.

PLUCK-Y KONG

Tropical Freeze incorporates a number of tricks—old and new—to keep the platforming fresh and challenging. In addition to the dynamic camera, a new "plucking system" also packs plenty of surprises. While traversing the island, you'll discover plug-like items that need to be pulled from whatever surface they're wedged into; doing so can trigger switches, reveal items, and create different reactions within the environment.

ISLAND HOPPING



▲ Thanks to *Tropical Freeze*'s dynamic camera trickery, you'll experience entirely new, 2D-defying perspectives.

▲ Some of the most visually impressive levels are underwater. Swimming feels fantastic behind the Wii Remote.

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY: TROPICAL FREEZE

INFO
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Retro Studios
Platforms: Wii U

RELEASE DATE
November 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player co-op

GENRE
Action-platformer

SUITABLE FOR
Side-scrolling fans open to scrolling in a new direction

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
Donkey Kong Country Returns 3D is the best way to prep for the chest-pounding primate's debut on Wii U.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze.*

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Eye-popping new HD presentation
- ❤ Fresh gameplay mechanics
- ❤ Polished platforming, inventive level design

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Will Retro fans boycott until they get a new *Metroid*?

KILLZONE: SHADOW FALL

Fight the Helghast, but do it quietly • Words: Mikel Reparaz

Picking up about 30 years after the events of *Killzone 3* left the hostile planet Helghan uninhabitable, *Killzone: Shadow Fall* takes the series in an interesting new direction: cold war. After their conflict with neighboring planet Vekta ended with the destruction of their homeworld, the surviving Helghast refugees were given their own chunk of Vekta. And while things went smoothly for a while, the planet's now divided, with the Helghast and Vektans separated by a gigantic border wall.

Where earlier *Killzones* were about open war, *Shadow Fall* focuses on smaller, clandestine commando missions behind enemy lines, casting you as an elite "Shadow Marshal" named Lucas Kellan—which means stealth is strongly encouraged. It's also much more open than its predecessors; not only was the mission I played set in a huge, freely explorable map, but its objectives could be tackled in any order,

FOCUSES ON CLANDESTINE MISSIONS BEHIND ENEMY LINES

and that order affected gameplay. Blowing up a comms station first, for example, knocked out the Helghast's ability to sound alarms, freeing me up to rescue the survivors of a friendly dropship crash or take out enemy AA guns without fear of getting mobbed. Accomplishing both of those cleared the way for our troop transport to land, at which point the survivors and I fought through waves of Helghast to secure a path to the LZ.

Aside from the open structure, *Shadow Fall*'s most striking addition came in the form of the OWL, a little multipurpose drone that I could order around. Not only was it capable of stunning, distracting, or killing enemies, but it could temporarily lay down a bulletproof force field, hack computers, and create ziplines for getting across chasms or from high to low places in a hurry. It's still too early to say if *Shadow Fall* will be an essential PS4 launch title, but so far it's certainly impressive.

▼ It simply wouldn't be a modern shooter if you didn't go toe-to-toe with a gunship.

@GAMER XTRA

In *@GAMER*'s digital edition, you'd find a highlight video of the *Killzone: Shadow Fall* demo we experienced here.

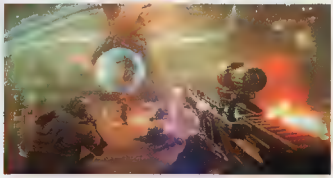
BIG MOMENTS \\

Aside from its impressive size and sense of scale, the stage I explored was relatively low-key. However, the explosive gameplay revealed at Shadow Fall's debut back in February should reassure anyone who's worried—the PS4 launch title will certainly feature plenty of huge, triple-A spectacle.

MEET THE ENEMY \\

Shadow Fall promises numerous enemy types, including snipers who can teleport to new vantage points.

▲ You'll get support from friendlies, but working alone is its own kind of fun.



▲ *Shadow Fall*'s terror attack promises to show a side to the conflict we've never seen.

GAME DETAILS

KILLZONE: SHADOW FALL

INFO
Publisher: SCEA
Developer: Guerrilla Games
Platforms: PS4

RELEASE DATE
TBA 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
TBA

GENRE
First-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Sneaky commandos who aren't intimidated by a little freedom of choice

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Crysis 3's open structure and stealth make it an excellent warm-up.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Killzone: Shadow Fall*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Open, stealthy approach could help it stand apart
- OWL is fun and versatile
- The demo included lots of different terrain and hiding spots to explore

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Doesn't feel like a huge visual improvement over PS3 shooters

BAYONETTA 2

Gaming's most fashionable fighter is back

Words: Ryan Taljonick

In traditional folklore, witches practice magic and ride flying brooms—but in *Bayonetta*, they strap guns to their high heels and use their hair as weapons against mega-ugly angels. Say what you will about *Bayonetta*'s take on witchcraft, but there's no denying its butt-kicking heroine has plenty of style.

The combo-driven action series developed a cult following thanks to its over-the-top combat, and *Bayonetta 2* plays almost exactly like its predecessor: You'll destroy enemies by pulling off ridiculous combos with a slew of weapons including guns, whips, and dual swords. As always, variety is key; the more you mix up your combo chains, the better your mission score, granting additional halos for increasing your combat abilities.

As if that's not enough incentive to try out each of Bayonetta's many weapons, you'll be eager to do so just to see her outrageous battle animations and dramatic Torture Attack finishing moves. During my hands-on demo, it was impossible not to smile as Bayonetta cartwheeled around a stage, turned her hair into a giant fist, and punched an angelic horse thing into an iron maiden torture device while riding on top of a fighter jet.

But this spectacle was tame compared to the boss fight that followed. A giant dragon monster erupted from the heavens, laying waste to everything in its path. Naturally, Bayonetta turned her hair into wings, allowing her to go toe-to-toe with the beast in midair. This was admittedly a tough fight, and I had to rely a lot on last-second dodging to initiate Witch Time, a debuff that slows enemy attack and movement speed for a few seconds.

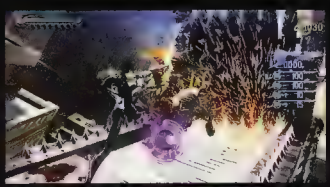
As I strung together some combos, I built up Bayonetta's new Umbran Climax meter, which, when activated, granted additional damage for a brief period of time. Both of these mechanics saved my skin on multiple occasions, boss fight or no, and they allowed me to chip away at the dragon until it was near dead—at which point Bayonetta transformed her hair into an even bigger dragon to finish it off. Obviously.

Bayonetta 2 hardly tampers with the action formula of its predecessor, instead flavoring its ludicrous premise with a few new mechanics and weapons. But these minor additions add more depth to the already intricate battle system, and you can bet this game will have plenty of flair—oh, and about 18 tons of hair.

Deadly Feet
Gun heels give the phrase "let's dance" a whole new meaning.
Deadly Hair
Bayonetta's locks double as both her clothing and her primary weapon.

**UMBRAN CLIMAX ** Use new special meter like as you perform combos. Once it's full, you can activate it to unleash Bayonetta's full combat potential, literally making combo strings with increased range and damage. Best of all, Bayonetta's animations also get a little extra oomph, as seen in the image above. Timing your usage of the Umbran Climax will often mean the difference between life and death. Talk about a hot hair day.

THE WITCH RETURNS



▲ Torture Attacks are awesome finishing moves for destroying enemies in style.

▲ Jeanne returns as well, though she's now more of a friend than a rival.

CO-OP AND OFF-TV PLAY \\

Is your family watching TV on the big screen? No problem: You can play Bayonetta 2 on the Wii U's GamePad, thanks to Off-TV Play. Unless, of course, you're wanting to dive into its new two-player co-op mode. Few details are available on what this mode entails other than it's a standalone experience separate from the single-player campaign, and I have a hard time conceptualizing exactly how the complex combat controls would translate to a Wii Remote. Still, having the option to play Bayonetta 2 with a friend is pretty enticing.

Wii U

GAME DETAILS

BAYONETTA 2

INFO
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Platinum Games
Platforms: Wii U

RELEASE DATE
TBA 2014

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player co-op

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Adrenaline junkies, style obsessives

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

DmC: Devil May Cry **is an excellent action game on-par with** ***Bayonetta*****'s combo-driven combat.**

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Tight, stylish action combat and responsive controls
- ❤ Over-the-top presentation

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ No info on what the 2-player co-op mode entails
- ✖ We have to wait until 2014 to play it

▼ Will you mash or master the controls? Expect gory results either way!

RYSE: SON OF ROME

A system seller shall rise? • Words: Andrew Hayward

Crytek made its name on intense first-person shooters such as *Far Cry* and *Crysis*, but aims to take charge at the Xbox One launch with a very different kind of brutal action affair. *Ryse: Son of Rome* is a vivid and ultra-violent experience that puts you in the armor of Marius Titus, a Roman general seized with vengeance after seeing his family murdered by barbarians.

Originally planned for Kinect and Xbox 360, *Ryse* has been reborn on Xbox One as a controller-based, hack-n-slash title that dazzles with its depictions of chaotic warfare. I played a segment of the game that unfolded like an Ancient Roman version of D-Day in World War II, with Titus leading his soldiers via ships onto a beach being bombarded with cannon and arrow fire. The detail on the hero's face as he rouses his charges is amazing, and is quickly matched by the visual decadence of ships crashing into the shoreline and crimson splashes from swords plunged into foes.

Combat revolves around what Crytek refers to as "mashing and mastering"—that is, the average player can succeed in battle by tapping whichever buttons he or she sees fit, but the advanced user that follows the on-screen cues for finisher moves will see more thrilling executions and receive bonuses as a result. In my limited time with *Ryse*, the combat had an awkward tenor to it and didn't feel terribly fulfilling as it covered the screen with gory results, but further practice may yield more intriguing results.

DAZZLES WITH ITS DEPICTIONS OF CHAOTIC WARFARE

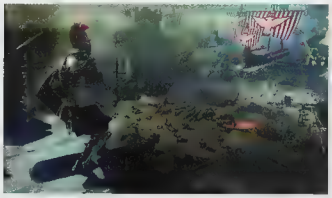
Ryse: Son of Rome also promises potentially interesting squad mechanics, as seen via a sequence that found Titus and his troops in a shielded formation charging toward lines of archers. It required alternating actions of hunkering down to guard against flaming arrows and launching spears in return—simple, sure, but Crytek promises many different formations across the single-player experience. And while Kinect is no longer a primary input device, it can be used to call out voice commands, directing troops to complete certain actions on the battlefield.

No doubt, *Ryse: Son of Rome* is one of the most visually impressive titles I've seen thus far on the Xbox One. While the combat currently isn't as gripping as the presentation, I'm hopeful that Crytek's latest will prove to be as thrilling as its past work—and more than a mere hardware showcase.

▼ Only campaign action has been shown so far, but expect to slash ample foes in online co-op as well.

ROAM TOGETHER \\ While Ryse's narrative-led campaign is a single-player affair, Crytek has confirmed that the game will include a separate cooperative multiplayer mode. You'll be able to team up online in gladiator-style battles, which take place in large, spectacle-filled colosseums. It sounds as though the multiplayer experience will be similar in structure to Gears of War's Horde mode, pitting squads against waves of increasingly powerful foes, and Microsoft claims that they'll be set in "dynamic environments." Details are few for now, but we'll be doubtless learning more on what to expect from co-op before Ryse is released.

SMART TECH \\ Ryse features Xbox SmartGlass support, which means that supported tablet and smartphone owners the ability to tap into the game to view timely tips and friends' saved gameplay clips, customize their character, and even browse stats that pit their in-game feats against those of Xbox Live pals.



▲ Use Kinect commands to direct troops, or even to simply encourage them in battle.

▲ With SmartGlass on a phone or tablet, you can access personal and community stats.

GAME DETAILS

RYSE: SON OF ROME

INFO
Publisher: Microsoft Studios
Developer: Crytek
Platforms: Xbox One

RELEASE DATE
Q4 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Co-op

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Gladiator fans, graphics nuts

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
Gear up for gladiatorial battles with the XBLA and PSN fighter *Spartacus Legends*.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!
Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch gameplay footage for *Ryse: Son of Rome*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Incredible visual detail
- Impressive scale to the environments
- Formation sequences add interesting twist

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Combat feels a little clunky so far

YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z

It's not murder if it's already dead

Words: Mikel Reparaz

Not many people could bounce back from being violently bisected by Ryu Hayabusa, protagonist of the *Ninja Gaiden* games—but Yaiba Kamikaze isn't most people, and now he's got a bionic arm and a hunger for revenge. Somehow, that revenge involves carving up a whole bunch of zombies. Perhaps it's best not to ask why.

Whatever the reasons, *Yaiba*—the brainchild of Keiji Inafune, creator of *Mega Man* and *Dead Rising*—seems to offer up fresh takes on ninja carve-em-ups and zombie action, with a hero who can not only lay into undead hordes with his sword, but use his robot arm to turn them into weapons. Grabbing garden-variety zombies, for example, lets Yaiba swing them around like a long meat flail, while beating down a larger zombie called a Shredder ends with the chance to execute them via quick-time event, after which Yaiba yanks off their arms to use as quick, devastating "Numb-Chucks." (The better you time the QTE, the longer you can use the improvised weapon.) Toward the end of my time with the game, defeating a hulking, fiery zombie called a Scorcher even let Yaiba yank off its head for use as a combination grenade launcher/flamethrower.

As gruesome as it sounds, *Yaiba* plays it all for laughs, combining a stark, shadowy graphic-novel look with overt zombie slapstick and a hero who's as likely to stand around cackling in a rain of panties (after blowing up a lingerie store with a truck, of course) as he is to go into a blood-fueled rage in the middle of a crowd of zombies.

What makes *Yaiba* especially interesting, however, is the variety my short hands-on promised; aside from killing tons of zombies with their own body parts, Yaiba can run on walls, use zombies as the solutions for simple puzzles, and combine or otherwise exploit zombies charged with elemental energy (fire or ice, for example). And considering that the demo ended just shy of a confrontation with a massive, two-headed zombie baby in the grip of a tantrum, it's clear that this brief glimpse is just a taste of the weirdness that's in store for 2014.

GRUESOME AS IT SOUNDS, *YAIBA* PLAYS IT ALL FOR LAUGHS

ZOM COM \\ [illegible] Inafune: drama and comedy. "What if you literally turned into a zombie?" Inafune says. "It's not that the zombie-ness has character appeal, it's what surrounds it that has character. If they were faceless, you wouldn't be able to rip their arms off. It'd be [illegible]. But if it's zombies, you rip their arms off and..." At this point, he applauds.

01 THE KILL
Yaiba's fast, foul-mouthed, and decidedly slimier than Ryu Hayabusa, the ninja he's out to kill.

02 THE ZOMBIES
Enemies are bog-list zombies, but the rewards for killing them are more fun.

SHADOW WARRIOR SWAGGER \\

METAL MUSCLE \\
Don't be fooled by his cocky demeanor and comical exploitation of zombies—Yaiba is as capable a ninja as Ryu Hayabusa ever was, and his bionic augmentations mean he's potentially deadlier than the Dragon Ninja.

▲ It's not clear why Yaiba first crossed swords with Ryu, but it didn't end well.

▲ Death hasn't slowed Yaiba down—acrobatics are a big part of the game.

GAME DETAILS

YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z

INFO
Publisher: Tecmo Koei
Developer: Comcept, Team Ninja, Spark Unlimited
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
TBA 2014

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Hack-n-slash fans who like a little comedy with their splatter

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

If you're in the mood for a goofy, gory slash-em-up, *Deadpool* is a guaranteed laugh.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Compelling art style and comic sensibilities
- ❤ Creating sword-and-zombie-flail attack combos is fun
- ❤ Inafune's resume leads us to expect great things

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Zombie harvesting aside, the combat feels simple

XBOX ONE

GAME DETAILS

PROJECT SPARK

INFO
Publisher: Microsoft Studios
Developer: Team Dakota
Platforms: Xbox One, Windows 8 devices, Smartglass devices

RELEASE DATE
TBA

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Yes, but details TBA

GENRE
Game building

SUITABLE FOR
Wannabe Will Wrights

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Though not as versatile, if you like the idea of world building, you'll dig *Minecraft*.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Project Spark*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Throwing a DIY party
- Collaboration and sharing are encouraged
- You could be the next indie gamemaking star

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- There'll likely be a metric ton of user-created crap
- Might be hard to find the gems in that metric ton

PROJECT SPARK

If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere · Words: Andy Eddy

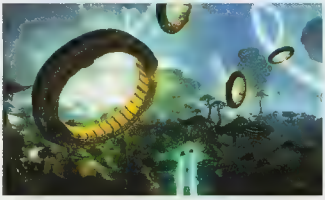
To some who'd like to make their own games, learning to program can be a tall hurdle. If Microsoft has its way, with *Project Spark* and an Xbox One or Windows 8 system, you'll be able to make a game over a cup of Java rather than poring over lines of JavaScript.

In my demo, crafting a lush, multitiered game world was a simple as "painting" with digital brushes. And it's contextually intelligent: If you're working on land terrain, the brush will render plants and vegetation, but if you're designing water terrain, you'll get fish and other sealife.

The complexity of artificial intelligence is eliminated by enabling you to edit how objects react to each other. My demo had a rock sidekick that was instructed to follow the main playable character—and in just seconds it was bouncing along a few steps behind my character. A "brain gallery"— a library of predesigned behaviors for you to play with and tweak—will come with the game.

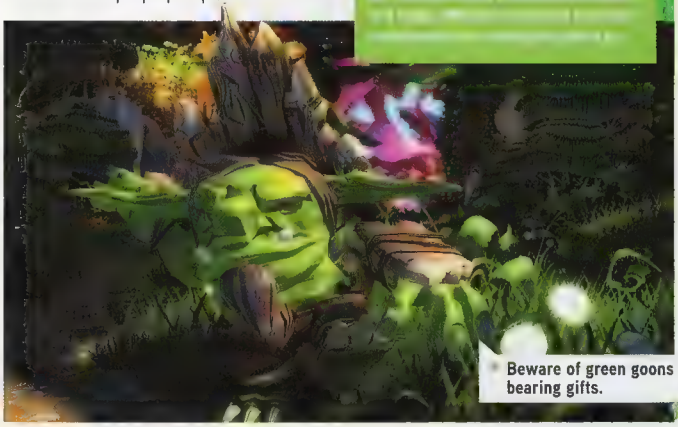
While 3D platformers seem easy to make, another demo showed a working music keyboard created with fence-post keys triggering notes. I can't wait to get more time with the software, which is in limited beta right now and due for release in the Xbox One's "launch window." Sign up for more details at joinprojectspark.com, and check out the *Project Spark* Facebook page at facebook.com/joinprojectspark.

Gamemakers will actually be able to craft some sophisticated environments.



This could be like a rings course in *Pilotwings* or a 3D take on *Gravitar*.

TAKE A SECOND \\



Beware of green goons bearing gifts.

MOUNT UP
Take to the unfriendly skies with Kinect or controller.

CRIMSON DRAGON

Dragon or Dragoon? Same difference • Words: Andrew Hayward

The *Panzer Dragoon* series is more than obvious inspiration for Microsoft's *Crimson Dragon*—it's essentially an unofficial predecessor. *Crimson Dragon* director Yukio Futatsugi oversaw the original *Dragoon* entries on Sega Saturn, while composer Saori Kobayashi also scored multiple past titles, and both on-rails shooter experiences put you on the back of a weaponized winged beast soaring through sensational, enemy-packed locales. *Crimson* is certainly a spiritual successor in both approach and personnel.

But the real proof is in *Crimson Dragon*'s gameplay, which captures the feel of Sega's beloved series a decade after its last iteration. For old fans, taking up the mount once more will feel like second nature. With the dragon's movement automated through the vibrant worlds, you'll instead control the camera and on-screen cursor, with the option to swap between homing shots—which can target several enemies at once—and a rapid-fire electric attack, and both are essential to defeat the myriad flying foes you'll encounter. The demo I played began with a pursuit of another dragon rider through a tight cave network before culminating with a battle against a colossal lava serpent, with the action maintaining a breakneck pace throughout.

Crimson Dragon supports both button controls and Kinect motion inputs. Playing with a controller, the game feels tense and thrilling—and utterly familiar to this old *Panzer Dragoon* fan. Fingers crossed that the added precision of the Xbox One's Kinect sensor makes that experience feel anywhere near as precise. Despite the colorful terrain and zippy tenor, the game doesn't have a noticeable next-gen sheen to it, plus the Kinect controls remain a question mark. Still, this throwback shooter should scratch an itch that's been burning for some time.

ALL FOR ONE \\

▲ [illegible]

GAME DETAILS

CRIMSON DRAGON

INFO
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Grounding/Land Ho!
Platforms: Xbox One

RELEASE DATE
TBA

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
TBA

GENRE
Shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Dragon-riding dreamers, fantasy enthusiasts

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Original Xbox favorite *Panzer Dragoon Orta* is also playable on Xbox 360.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Crimson Dragon*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ **Fast-paced, exciting on-rails shooter**
- ❤ **It's essentially a new *Panzer Dragoon***

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ **Lacks next-gen visuals**
- ✖ **Will Kinect controls be precise enough?**

BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS

He's younger. He's angrier. But can he be better?

Words: Charlie Barratt

The Batcave is more than just a fancy basement. It's a perfect metaphor for Batman himself: dark and hidden, both gothic and futuristic. How appropriate, then, that as this secret and sacred space makes its debut in *Batman: Arkham Origins* (the one from *Arkham Asylum* was a smaller re-creation, located below the island and not Wayne Manor), it should also serve as a perfect representation of everything new developer WB Montreal is hoping to achieve with October's prequel.

First? Respect for what's come before. Scattered around the Batcave are Easter-egg references to the hero's history, including an unfinished Batmobile from the previous two games. Eric Holmes, creative director on *Origins*, tells me this isn't the only tribute to Rocksteady, the franchise's original developer: "The biggest thing we could have done wrong is take apart [what already] worked so well."

To that end, the free-flow combat, invisible predator, and detective mechanics that Rocksteady introduced—and that Holmes calls "industry standards"—remain intact, but each features an added twist to keep the gameplay from feeling too familiar. New enemies like the Martial Artist can counter Batman's counters, while new bosses like Copperhead are stealthy enough to transform him from predator into prey. Most expanded of all are the crime-solving scenes, which task the World's Greatest Detective with scanning and tracking multiple pieces of evidence across a Gotham City that's now double the size of *Arkham City*.

But the Batcave, currently a mess of exposed wires and disorganized tools, is also symbolic of how WB Montreal is making the game uniquely its own. "All of our aesthetic is very bench made," says Holmes. "Batman's costume looks like it's something he pieced together; the Batcave itself is under construction. He's building what he needs as he needs it." That includes relationships, as a younger and cockier Bruce Wayne—exposed to villains like Bane, Joker, and Black Mask for the first time on Christmas Eve—is forced to trust his butler Alfred and police captain (not yet commissioner) Gordon in order to survive the night.

In other words, Batman is not quite Batman in *Arkham Origins*, and getting him there promises to be one of this year's most exciting challenges.

WELCOME HOME

The Batcave is the hub—and heart—of Origins

It was substituted in *Asylum*, and shown only as a DLC map in *City*, but you'll finally get to explore the real-deal Batcave in *Arkham Origins*. To ensure the wait was worthwhile, WB Montreal's designed the underground lair as an essential—and expansive—part of the game. In addition to the Batcomputer (for detective work) and Batwing (for fast travel around Gotham), there's an infirmary where Batman can replenish his health, a workbench where he can pick up gear, a Batsuit chamber for switching skins, a training simulator to access challenge modes, and an evidence board so filled with spoiler potential that I'm not allowed within a dozen virtual feet of it. Best of all, though, is Alfred. The butler appears onscreen for the first time in the series, and plays a major role in the storyline.

**EVERY PENNY'S WORTH ** You'll earn XP talking to Alfred, though a less mature Bruce Wayne won't always like what his moral compass has to say.

GEARING UP

Like many of us, *Origins*' creative director Eric Holmes saved the optional challenge maps in *Asylum* and *City* until after he'd beaten the main story modes, and as a result, didn't realize "how deep the mechanics went" until it was too late. The solution? Combat training is now available right in the Batcave, and a new XP-driven upgrade tree encourages you to practice and learn all of Batman's moves. Holmes hopes this change will help players "get that black belt of Batman skills during the campaign and feel like they mastered the character more."

RIDDLE ME THIS? \\
This trap looks familiar. Does the Mad Hatter have a puzzle-obsessed partner?

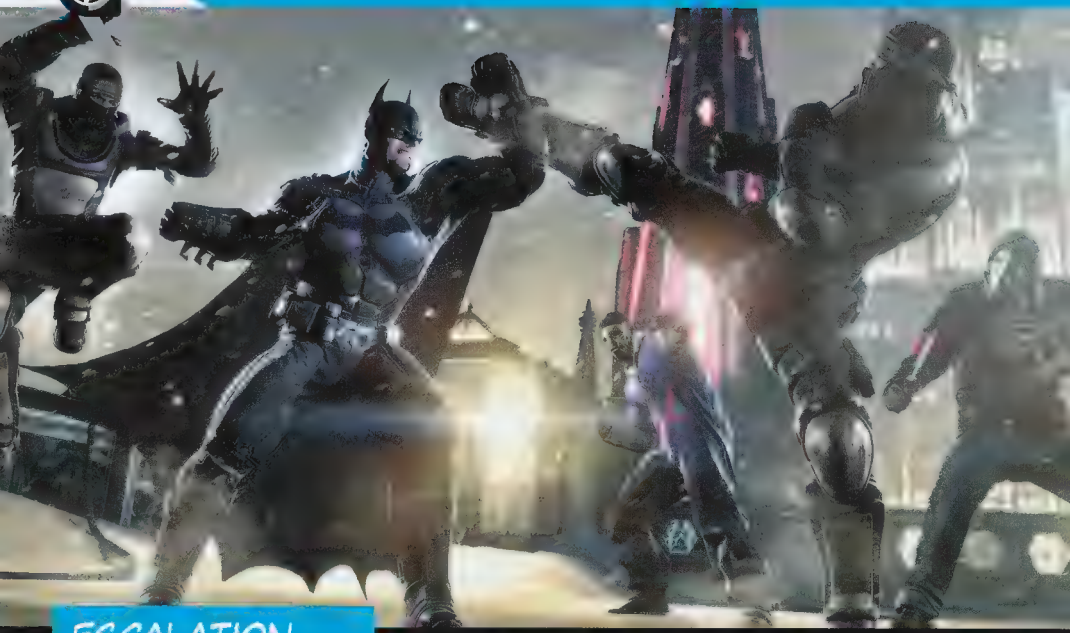
Crime-stopping side missions can improve your reputation with GCPD.

Search for clues in first-person and slow-motion with new detective skills.

MOST WANTED

The Mad Hatter is kidnapping Alice lookalikes and holding them hostage in a hallucinogenic, booby-trapped Wonderland that serves as the prequel's version of Scarecrow nightmares. These encounters are examples of the game's optional Most Wanted cases, however, and can be skipped entirely if you want.

BATMAN'S LAIR IS AN ESSENTIAL, EXPANSIVE PART OF THE GAME



ESCALATION

Two new enemy types threaten to bring the Bat down in Arkham Origins. Armored Lieutenants (below) are invulnerable tanks until you've stunned them with your cape, then unleashed a flurry of melee moves to remove their protection. Martial Artists (above) can evade Batman's counters and retaliate with counters of their own. Both will require you to bring an extra level of finesse and strategic thinking into each battle.

A NEW NOTCH ON THE BAT BELT

Batman invents fast: You'll start this origin story with all of the gadgets from the later games, plus—holy continuity error!—a couple you've never seen before. The Remote Claw connects distant objects with rope, be they two walls (custom perch) or two thugs (double takedown). Plant the Concussion Detonator on an enemy, meanwhile, and they'll dumbly attack their own teammates. In a revealing Batcave moment, Alfred urges Bruce not to use this latter device on the Gotham City police.

THE FIRST FOES

Creative Director Eric Holmes introduces Batman's newest villains

A. BLACK MASK

"We've got these old-school criminals—the Maronis, the Falcones—who are established, traditional mobsters. And we've got these other [criminals] who are coming up and changing the Gotham landscape, who wear costumes and have strange abilities and mental issues. Roman Sionis, the Black Mask, is that crossing point between the two. He looks like a mobster, he thinks very practically, but he's got one weird quirk and that's that he wears this mask."

B. DEATHSTROKE

"The anti-Batman. He works in a very similar way—he's thought everything through beforehand [and] he's got a whole bunch of tricks up his sleeve. With Deathstroke, we wanted to challenge ourselves to [design] a one-on-one fight with someone who's a peer of Batman and can do to him what he can do to others: someone using gadgets, someone using counters, someone using ranged combat, someone putting the heat to him."

C. ANARKY

"He's not a villain who robs banks and steals things; he wants to destroy corporations, kick out the government, and liberate people because he thinks that's the right thing to do. He sees himself as being heroic. He actually likes Batman [and] wants Batman to join him. If there ever was a character in the mythology whose time has come in the world today, it's Anarky."

D. COPPERHEAD

"A creepy predator character with whom we can create tension and reverse the classic Batman scenario. Batman's normally standing on the gargoyle, looking down at the guys who don't know he's there, but with Copperhead, we have someone that can stalk Batman. Through him being poisoned by [her], we also have the ability to do visual abstractions."

X

OGAMER XTRA

Sign up for *OGAMER*'s digital edition to hear Eric Holmes' full descriptions of the *Origins* rogues gallery.

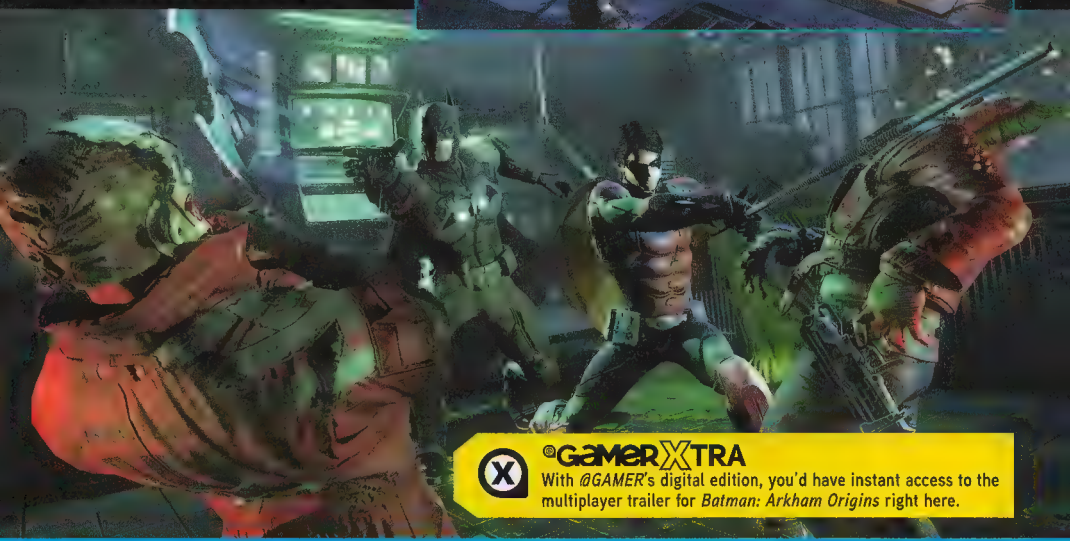
MULTIPLAYER

Six thugs. Two heroes. One surprising mode.

Yes, *Arkham Origins* has multiplayer. Yes, you get to play as Batman (or Robin). Yes, you have your gadgets, and, yes, the goal is to stalk and intimidate your friends from the shadows, just as you did to generic computer-controlled opponents in the campaign. The real shock, however, is that playing as the prey seems almost as fun. Gun-toting thugs can customize their appearance, remote-control explosive blimps or UAVs, use a limited amount of detective vision, and—halfway through each match—call on either the Joker or Bane (depending whose gang reaches the spawn point first) to brutally take out both the other team and the superheroes. Kill Robin as the Joker? Break Batman's back as Bane? Yes, you can do that too.

**SIDEKICK ** *Splash Damage, which developed 2011's Brink, is making the multiplayer portion of Origins.*

**SECRET WEAPON ** *Bane comes equipped with a rocket launcher, while Joker brings a one-shot handgun.*



@GAMERXTRA
With *@GAMER*'s digital edition, you'd have instant access to the multiplayer trailer for *Batman: Arkham Origins* right here.

STALK AND INTIMIDATE YOUR FRIENDS FROM THE SHADOWS

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS

INFO
Publisher: WBIE
Developer: WB Montreal, Splash Damage [multiplayer]
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii U, PC

RELEASE DATE
October 25, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8-player online

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Batfans willing to dig deeper, and earlier, into Batlore

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
Tomb Raider is the perfect example of a prequel done right.

ARKHAM ORIGINS BLACKGATE

Why you should be excited for the 2D handheld Arkham Origins as well. Really!

> It's not a port, but a unique game designed specifically for 3DS and PS Vita

> It's from Armature Studio, a developer with experience making *Metroid* games

> It's nonlinear: Explore and complete the Joker, Penguin, and Black Mask areas in any order you please

> It takes place between the stories of *Arkham Origins* and *Arkham Asylum*

> It forgoes cut-scenes for vibrant comic-inspired, hand-drawn animation

> It features unique gadgets, unique takedowns, and unique characters not encountered in previous entries

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Batman: Arkham Origins.*

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ A compelling new take on how Batman begins
- ❤ Combat and stealth evolved...just enough
- ❤ Multiplayer that might actually be good

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Missing Mark Hamill and Kevin Conroy
- ✖ No next-gen?

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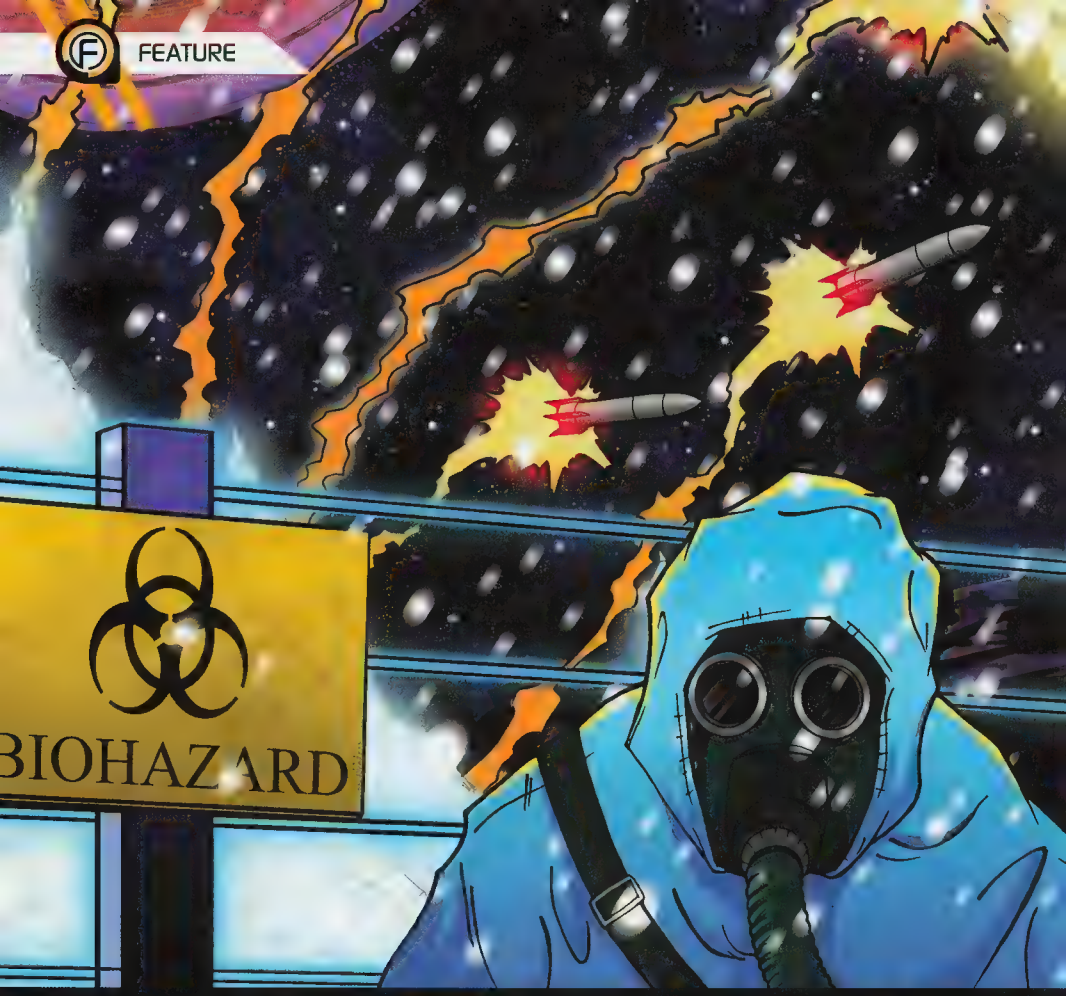


HOW I SURVIVED

Games taught me to be strong, brave, and save often • Words: Hollander Cooper

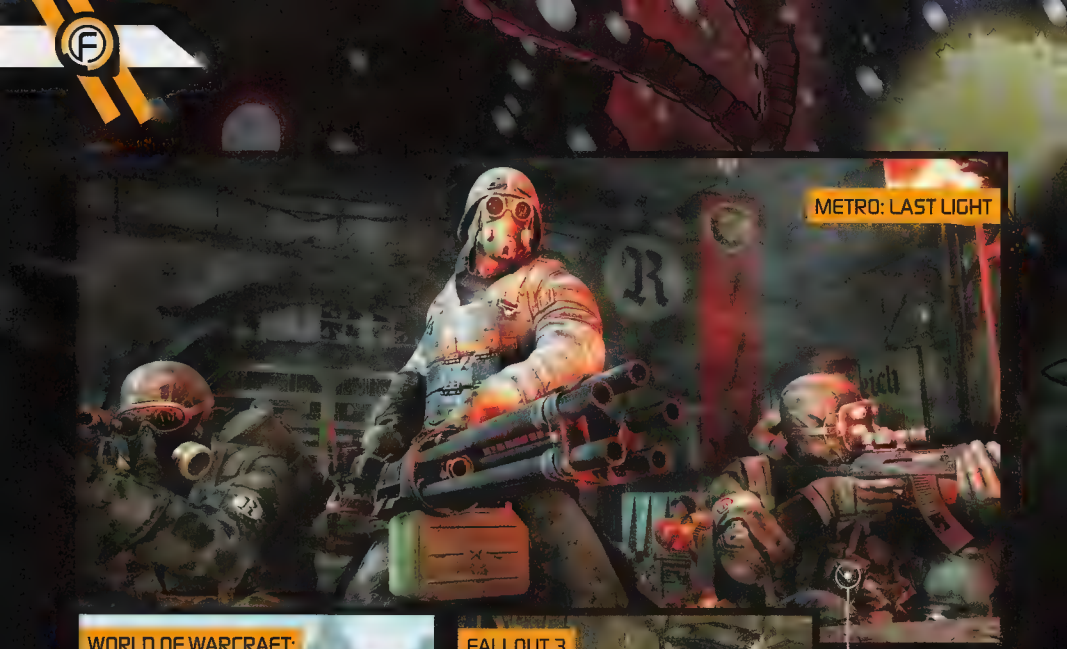
If you're reading this, it means... well, it could mean anything. It could mean I'm dead—sure, that's a possibility. It could mean we're saved. It could mean I just misplaced this thing, and you picked it up and thought about flipping through it before tossin' it into a fire. It doesn't matter. Either way, I figure it's good to tell you why I'm writing this. Who I am isn't important; what you do need to know, and what you've already figured out by reading this, is that I survived. I don't know how, but I survived. And I plan to keep on surviving, and hope to help others do just the same. But I didn't make it this far because of military training, or because my dad taught me how to build a fire or anything like that. No, I learned to survive the end of the world because of videogames, as crazy

THE APOCALYPSE

as that might sound. Don't believe me? Fine. Here's my story.

JUNE 14, 20XX

Every night I see her. I see her dress waving in the field of rye. I see her kind smile, her soft hair. I hear her voice speaking to me. But every morning her dress is a rusty curtain, her smile a cracked window, her hair an overgrown weed. And her voice...actually, that's funny. The thing I didn't expect was the silence. There's wind, of course, and the sound of footsteps and breathing, but that's about it. The sounds of cars ▶



▲ What's more dangerous: the end of the world or *World of Warcraft*? The jury's out.

▲ *Fallout* will teach you how bad of a person you'd be if the end of the world arrived.

TAKE THE BUS
Above ground, the world is filled with monsters, radiation, and other horrible things. Below? Crazy people that'll kill you for your pocket lint. Pick your poison.

and the dull hum of electricity used to be so familiar, I didn't even know they were there. Even when I'd go camping in the woods, I'd still hear it echoing in the distance. But now? Silence. It's nice, in a way, and abhorrent and terrible in another.

The day was pretty quiet. I didn't run into anyone, or anything, so I just collected supplies. In fact, that's my first tip: collect everything. Ever play *Fallout 3*? That game was a lifesaver when my world became their world. It taught me to pick up any useful thing not bolted to the ground—and to carry a bolt remover, so that isn't really an issue, either. Everyone thinks to squirrel away the water and food they find, but you'd be shocked at how many people ignore other basic things. I saw a guy once who horded rooms full of money. Like, as in old world dollars. How insane is that? I grab matchsticks, and paper, and blankets. Oh, and water—obviously, as much water as possible. There's water everywhere, and some people end up dying trying to find a bottle when they need it most. *Metro: Last Light* taught me to grab bullets, too, or anything else that'd be hard to make once things stopped working.

JULY 4, 20XX

I first met her on the Fourth of July. I was having a BBQ and she knocked on my door, asking me to turn the music down. I did, but I also invited her to join us. Man, did the chicken smell good; I can still smell it cooking. Well, not literally—the only thing I smell now is death and sulfur. The mutants rose up right after things went bad, just like they did in *Rage*. Evil buggers that don't respond to anything besides a bullet. I learned from the game, though, which put a lot of emphasis on the importance of vehicles, so I've got one fixed up and ready to go in case they attack. I don't even know what caused them to mutate into monsters. Was it the radiation? Some sort of military experiment? Did they play too much World of Warcraft? Some say they were here all along, climbing out of the ground when it cracked open. Whatever it was, they're mean. And they know where I'm hiding.

MAYBE, SOMEWHERE, SHE'S ALL RIGHT?

RAGE

Don't forget to learn how to throw knives, they're a life saver in *Rage*.

Ellie and Joel have each other's backs. Who has yours?

THE LAST OF US

So I'm going to hit the road, taking with me just what I need. Bag of food, some bullets to trade, as much water as I can carry, and a bow. You know, I played *The Last of Us*, and the bow was useful in that game, but I didn't think about how incredibly helpful a silent weapon with infinite ammo would be until I ran out of actual bullets. I've taken down at least four mutants with a bow, and I wouldn't give it up for anything.

JULY 25, 20XX

I thought I saw her today. I know I didn't, but I thought I did. My car broke down, so I had to hoof it. I'd made it out of the city by climbing over buildings, jumping from rooftop to rooftop, like *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West* taught me, and I found my way to a farm. She grew up on a farm, and always told me she wanted to show it to me. I pretended the one I found was the one she was talking about, even though it wasn't.

It was filled with zombies, though. Biters right out of a movie were wandering around the place, so I picked up a hatchet and started crushing their brains. I keep seeing people try to stab them in the chest or shoot them, and I'm like, "didn't you play *The Walking Dead*?" A few swings and the farm was cleared. I lived there for a few days, but had to move when the aliens started coming by.

SEPTEMBER 3, 20XX

It's been a while since I wrote anything here. I have another journal, one I talk to her in. I know it's crazy, but I feel like writing letters to her helps. Maybe, somewhere, she's all right? Maybe the aliens took her. I hope they didn't—they don't seem like the coddling type. They're big, and ugly, and have laser

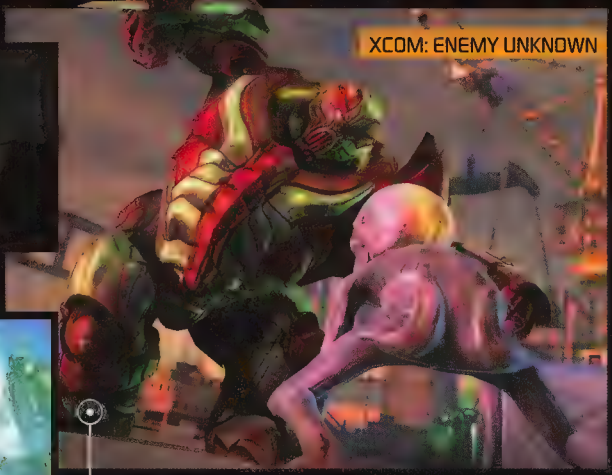
TIP FROM THE PRO

Looking for an easy way to survive a world-ending catastrophe? It's simple: Make sure you have bottled water, keep a large supply of food, keep your friends and family within arm's reach at all times, and it never hurts to get as many Achievements and Trophies as you can.

GAMES TAUGHT ME TO BELIEVE THE UNBELIEVABLE

People can be as dangerous as the undead when things go south.

Hopefully the world looks as pretty as it does in *Enslaved* when it...ends.



MARS ATTACKS!

How will the government handle an alien invasion? Well, in a word: poorly. There will be squabbles over resources, arguments, and a lot of deaths.

WAR IS...ROUGH
Gears shows what life would be like if a massive war was followed by another massive war, and then another one. Lots of war, you guys.

▲When in doubt, try to get help from War himself. Or Death, if he's around.

guns that eviscerate anything they hit. But I'd played enough *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* to know that the best weapon to use against them is their own, so I've been trying to steal one of their fancy blasters.

I had another idea...thought I might save this world if it worked. Remember in *Gears of War* when the Locusts and the Lambent went to war? I thought I could start a battle like that between the mutants and the aliens. Then, when they're all dead, the rest of the humans that are hiding can come back and start rebuilding. I have to imagine there are more of us out here, right?

I mean, more good ones. I've met plenty of jerks around the state. Some people just want to take your stuff and leave you for dead. Gone are the days of "thou shalt love thy neighbor" and any notion of things like karma. Now, there's this weird "every person for themselves" mindset that took over the moment zombies and mutants and aliens started fighting. Actually, now that I write that down I see how weird it is. The world is pretty messed up, isn't it?

NOVEMBER 28, 20XX

It was Thanksgiving, and I decided to stay home playing *Darksiders II* instead of meeting her family. I know, the irony—me deciding to envelop myself in the end of the world instead of enjoying the world while it was here. And now that it's here, I'd give anything to take it back. But the time I spent wasn't totally useless—*Darksiders* taught me the value of wielding a really, really big sword. So, I decided that I'm going to fight. I've found a group of soldiers who say they have a plan to destroy the aliens and the zombies in one fell swoop. Once they're taken care of, we can go after the mutants with the new tech we've lifted from the others. It's a long shot, but it's all we have. For the first time in years I'm excited for the future, and I can't believe I've made it this far. The weirdest thing of all? I feel like videogames have prepared me for this; they've taught me to understand the incredible. To believe the unbelievable. To be ready to fight things that can't be fought.

Let's do this.

FIVE WAYS THE WORLD COULD END

1

PLAGUE

It'd start off as a footnote on Page Seven of the newspaper. Within a week you'd hear about it online. A month later? We're all gone.

2

WORLD WAR III

Nukes going off, countries invading other countries, all-out war. It makes for a fun videogame, but wouldn't be as fun IRL.

3

ZOMBIE OUTBREAK

It'd be the same as the "plague," except instead of killing people, it would kill people and then bring them back to life. It's tough to say which one's worse.

4

ASTEROID IMPACT

It happened at least once, and it's going to happen again. Hopefully we'll have a big enough bomb to save ourselves.

5

ALIEN INVASION

No, they aren't coming in peace. If anything, they're coming because we look delicious, and they think they'd love to serve us with dinner.

PREDICTION

I think it'll be all of the above. Aliens will unleash a plague that turns people into zombies, then we'll fight them, kicking off World War III. And while we're distracted by all the fighting? That's right—a giant rock from space smashes into Earth.

START YOUR ENGINES

Looking ahead at the racing genre's most promising new competitors

Words: Timothy J. Seppala

Racing games are one of *the* go-to genres when it comes to showing off what new gaming hardware can do. Not much else displays a console's raw prowess at launch better than the seductive curves of a supercar or a perilous mountain pass. If you're a fan of four-wheeled mayhem, this year's E3 had no shortage of games to get your engine revving. Whether you're after fast-and-loose arcade affairs, oh-so-serious sims, or something straddling the line between the two, over the next four pages I've got you covered.

While fancy HD graphics will garner most of the attention, what makes this year's class stand out is the gameplay. Developers know that shaving seconds off a lap time and bolting on custom parts has been done to death, so they've looked outward for innovation. The biggest theme with this new crop of racers is connectivity. While I've only seen a sample of what's on tap for the coming months, it's safe to say I'm stoked with how devs are looking to make the line between single-player and multiplayer vanish. The idea is to replace races where you'd typically go wheel-to-wheel against AI for pole position with battles against opponents from around the world—all while advancing through your personal career.

Not buying a PlayStation 4 or Xbox One this fall? I've got you covered here, too. A few new chances to grip a virtual steering wheel await you even if you're holding out. At the end, I've even rounded up some gems you may have missed that shouldn't end up costing you more than a gas-tank fill-up. Buckle up, it's time to race.

THE CREW

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ivory Tower, Ubisoft Reflections • Platforms: PS4, Xbox One, PC • Release Date: Spring 2014

Unless there are sufficient jams pumping out of the speakers, I often have to slap Mr. Sandman around while I'm behind the wheel on a road trip. If only I had challenges like staying on a racing line, executing a killer drift, or maintaining a clean section while driving down the interstate to keep me occupied. This is where Ubisoft's *The Crew* comes in. Keeping you from dozing while driving on the more than 3000 miles of quick-travelable pavement is the developers' goal. In this open-worlder, the United States is your playground. Want to drive from Detroit to Las Vegas or maybe touch both coasts and stop in Miami along the way? Do it here. It might take a few hours in-game, but along the way there's all manner of mini-distractions like those listed above. From what I've seen so far, *The Crew* is on track to hold my interest.

NEED FOR SPEED: RIVALS

Publisher: EA • Developer: Ghost Games • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PS4, Xbox One, PC • Release Date: Nov. 19 (PS3, Xbox 360, PC), Fall 2013 (PS4, Xbox One)

In *Need for Speed: Rivals*, you don't need to choose whether you're playing with friends or by yourself—everyone's playing together at all times. Thanks to the new "All-Drive" system, jumping in and out of a friend's game is transparent and, according to developer Ghost Games, should create experiences you'd never see happen during a race against AI. It's an evolution of *Hot Pursuit*'s online campaign and I'm curious to see how it will all play out. I've seen support gameplay in other genres, but in *Rivals* you can have a pal using a tablet app call in a helicopter to help chase down wily racers while you're in a police car below. Cool. Ghost is comprised of former DICE (*Battlefield*, *Mirror's Edge*) and Turn 10 (*Forza* series) employees, so even if the name on the back of the box doesn't look familiar, rest assured that the studio has been behind the wheel before.

DRIVECLUB

Publisher: SCEA • Developer: Evolution Studios • Platforms: PS4 • Release Date: Fall 2013

DriveClub is the latest from the team behind the *MotorStorm* franchise. Instead of pushing through tornados or over volcanos, though, you're racking up points and times and challenging your friends to beat them. These challenges occupy their own leaderboard, so your friends can see how they're stacking up against not only you, but one another as well. (More if they want to push it viral!) Want to up the ante further? Don't sit on your laurels. Whenever the challenge is active, you can try to clown your own time. You know, just to throw salt in the wound of whoever barely trumped your last set. PlayStation Plus members will get a near-full version of this socially connected arcade racer for free. This makes me giddy, because I'll have even *more* people to dominate on the track. The Plus version will lack a few cars or courses, but I'm told the absent content can be purchased via the PS Store.

FORZA MOTORSPORT 5

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios • Developer: Turn 10 • Platforms: Xbox One • Release Date: Fall 2013

Ever wanted to earn money without really doing anything? *Forza Motorsport 5* has you covered. Its new "Drivatar" system learns your racing tendencies and takes the wheel when you're not home. Bump and shunt your way to victory regularly? Then it's likely your AI will, too. By learning your racing behaviors, Turn 10 hopes the friends you race against won't be able to tell the difference between you and your Drivatar. Beyond that, it's one of the most impressive-*looking* racers I've ever seen. Paint jobs aren't mirror-smooth; they'll often be as orange-peel ridden as when they left the factory. Brake rotors bear blemishes from use and even the chrome tailpipes will remain blue from race to race. The devil's in the details. For the first time in series history, *Forza 5* will also include open-wheel cars and the likes of Formula One rides from classic seasons.

GRAN TURISMO 6

Publisher: SCEA • Developer: Polyphony Digital • Platforms: PS3 • Release Date: Fall 2013

Gran Turismo 6 continues the near-fetishistic obsession developer Polyphony Digital has with autos. Its predecessor had a few dents here and there that kept it from feeling particularly shiny and new, but GT6 is addressing them head on. According to the dev studio, lethargic and copious load screens have been scrapped, and the physics engine and graphics have been upgraded, too. GT6 also features the legendary Goodwood Hill Climb course for its rally mode, enabling anyone to try and summit the English peak in glorious HD. Wait, isn't launching on last gen's hardware counterintuitive, though? Not really. Sony's has a history of putting a few marquee titles on its older systems while a new console begins to flourish. It's rumored that GT6 could see a release on PS4 after spending the holidays on PS3.

MARIO KART 8

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Nintendo EAD Group No. 1 • Platforms: Wii U • Release Date: Q1 2014

Mario's never been a stranger to performing crazy stunts, but *Mario Kart 8* could be the nuttiest of all. Racing on walls? Check. Driving on the ceiling, thanks to magnets? Check. Firing off red shells underwater while on a motorcycle? Check. Nintendo's going for broke with the latest entry in this storied franchise and I couldn't be happier. Surprisingly, what I'm most impressed by is that it runs at a *Call-of-Duty*–smooth framerate, making everything feel that much faster. I don't know anything about online multiplayer yet, but Miyamoto and company have said to expect something along the lines of the 3DS' (see the "Last Year's Models" sidebar below) online experience. Until then, though, I'm hoping MK8's matchmaking is as robust (if not more so) than its portable predecessor and welcome the promise of community tools like sharing our best clips via Miiverse.

LAST YEAR'S MODELS

Let these turn the key to your heart for less

FORZA HORIZON

Forza Horizon proved brown doesn't have to be downright depressing. Driving around this open-road and music festival-inspired Colorado makes for one of the best recent chill-out games.

NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

Developer Criterion's latest game proves why it's the king of arcade racers: It provides tight handling, a blistering sense of speed, and habit-forming asynchronous multiplayer.

MARIO KART 7

Mario Kart 7 might be the most daring entry in the franchise yet: hang gliding, underwater driving, and a first-person view were all new, as was the above-par execution of its online modes.

SONIC ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED

Don't miss this under-appreciated kart racer that traverses land, sea, and air, featuring characters from Sega's 40-plus-year history and...Danica Patrick?

GRID 2

How many racers can boast a mode that randomly generates tracks? How many of those can do so on the fly? Not a lot. Developer Codemasters' racing chops are on full display here.

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TOP PICKS

RATINGS BREAKDOWN:

@GAMER includes only the best games in our Top Picks section.

An average game. Just worthy enough to call to your attention.

A good game with some flaws. Fans of the genre will probably enjoy it.

A near-perfect gaming experience.

62
SPLINTER CELL BLACKLIST

Hey, meet the crew!

Let *@GAMER*'s own geek squad help you to know about the best-of-the-best games out now or coming soon.

This month, we ask the gamer panel:

In celebrating Labor Day, what game will you be laboring over most this fall?

David Chapman

Between tracking down figures and playsets, then creating cool games in Toy Box mode, *Disney Infinity* is shaping up to be the biggest likely labor for me—and my wallet.

Hollander Cooper

Honestly, I'm pumped to play a ton of *Pikmin 3*. Sure, *GTA5* will stare at me while I do it, but I'm excited to play a game that actually takes advantage of the Wii U's power.

Andrew Hayward

PixelJunk Monsters: Ultimate HD for PS Vita, no doubt. I've logged dozens of hours in *PJM*, and it's been long enough that his refresher will refuel my tower-defense addiction.

Nick Pino

I'm sure all of my friends and colleagues will be caught up in a *GTA5* fever pitch. Me? I've got a fever to get back on the pitch against Manchester United in *FIFA 14*.

TOP PICKS

62 SPLINTER CELL BLACKLIST
66 SAINTS ROW IV
70 MADDEN NFL 25
72 PIKMIN 3
74 THE BUREAU: XCOM DECLASSIFIED
76 TALES OF XILLIA
77 MARIO & LUIGI: DREAM TEAM
78 KILLER IS DEAD
79 PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES 2

MINI-REVIEWS

80 Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 Remix
80 Dragon's Crown
81 Payday 2
81 Shin Megami Tensei IV
82 Phineas and Ferb: Quest for Cool Stuff
82 Metal Gear Solid: The Legacy Collection
82 The Smurfs 2 (consoles)
82 The Smurfs 2 (DS)
83 LEGO Legends of Chima: Laval's Journey
83 Civilization V: Brave New World

NOT PICKS

The following games did not make the *@GAMER* cut:

Dark (Xbox 360)
"Cool vampire powers and memorable levels aren't enough to save this frustrating, bare-bones vampire stealth game."
—Mikel Reparaz

Time and Eternity (PS3)
"The ideas behind it are commendable, but the lazy execution and juvenile dialogue made me want to request a divorce well before Eternity's end."
—Casey DeFreitas

SPLINTER CELL BLACKLIST

Spider-Man

▼ The sad thing is, the guy about to get killed is just an intern who answered the wrong Craigslist ad.

▲ Even when enemies are wearing armor, they're still vulnerable to sneak attacks from behind.

Always bet on black • Words: Paul Semel

Like any good spy worth his weight in martinis, Sam Fisher is always adding new gadgets and weapons to his arsenal...which he's obviously going to need if he has any hope of stopping a series of escalating attacks on U.S. interests. But the most effective addition this time out isn't actually new—it's something Sam has sadly been missing of late: stealth tactics. And the game is better for it.

In fact, this third-person shooter doesn't just let Sam get all sneaky when he wants to—it often demands it, putting him in positions where killing enemies is tough, not allowed, or will alert everyone within a four-mile radius. Hence the return of hiding bodies, using noise to distract someone, and other stealth-action staples that, together, make this as classic a *Splinter Cell* as we've seen since 2005's *Chaos Theory*.

Which is not to say *Blacklist* is a total nostalgia trip. The other big addition is one Sam couldn't have done back in the day. Along with the story-driven solo missions, *Blacklist* also has both competitive (see "Aliens Among Us" sidebar) and co-operative modes (see "You've Got A Friend" sidebar). The twist is that they, and the solo side, are all integrated into a seamless story, and can be switched between on the fly...though if you don't play well with others, just doing the solo missions still makes this worth your while.

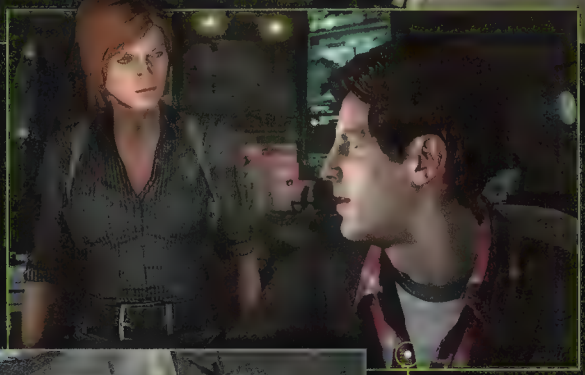
For all its integration and return-to-form-ing, however, *Blacklist* does have some rather irritating flaws. Clicking the right thumbstick to reload your weapon is counterintuitive, especially if you play a lot of shooters, while the camera—as in every third-person game—can sometimes make it difficult to see what needs to be seen.

Still, with otherwise fluid controls, challenging missions, and, most importantly, a return to the stealth action that made this series unique in the first place, *Blacklist* is proof that what's old can be new again.

BLACKLIST IS PROOF THAT WHAT'S OLD CAN BE NEW AGAIN

Sam can drop on unsuspecting foes, taking them out quickly and quietly.

ALIENS AMONG US \\



Make all the "silent but deadly" jokes you like, but Sam gets the job done.

HACK MAN

Charlie Cole, your IT guy, will help you by remotely circumventing alarm systems, hacking enemy computers, and brewing a calming cup of tea for you.

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE \\

Of all the changes being made to Splinter Cell: Blacklist, none has prompted as much ire and hand-wringing as the decision to replace actor Michael Ironside as the voice of Sam Fisher. But while it is a jarring change, especially for longtime fans, the real problem isn't that Sam no longer sounds like Richter from Total Recall, but that his replacement, actor Eric Johnson (Smallville), doesn't have the kind of commanding voice you'd want for the leader of a black-ops spy organization that's trying to save the U.S. from terrorists.

YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND \\

Nicely mixing things up, the co-op missions in Blacklist not only include solo-style sneaking missions, but some Horde-esque survival challenges as well. The problem is that they're unforgiving and lack checkpoints, which makes them significantly (and thus annoyingly) harder than the story missions. Don't play them solo.

GAME DETAILS

SPLINTER CELL BLACKLIST

INFO
Splinter Cell Blacklist
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Toronto
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii U, PC
Reviewed on: PS3

RELEASE DATE
August 20, 2013

NUMBER OF PLAYERS/ONLINE
Up to 8-player online competitive; 2-player online co-op

GENRE
Action-stealth

SUITABLE FOR
Fans of the older *SC* games, or other smart, stealthy shooters

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ A return to the series' sneaky action
- ❤ Smooth controls are intuitive
- ❤ Story, co-op, and multiplayer integrate seamlessly

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Some co-op missions are inconsistently hard

ANDY SAYS:
The jury's still out on Sam's new voice, but it's cool to see his outside-the-lines cutting loose on bad guys.

OVERALL RATING:

4.25

SAINTS ROW IV

Hail to the alien-killing chief • Words: Hollander Cooper

Saints Row IV takes the open-world crime series in an... interesting direction. Whereas past entries have cast you as criminals gangbanging around cities, *SR4* puts you in the shoes of the super-powered President of the United States, tasked with defending a virtual, Matrix-like world from the alien Zin Empire. See? Told you things would get weird. Even compared to *Saints Row the Third* (with Mayor Burt Reynolds, criminal luchadors, and zombie outbreaks) it's an absurd premise, but the departure provides an incredible, unique experience that plays unlike anything the series has seen—even in the face of occasional technical glitches.

Aside from being able to blow enemies up with crazy weapons, your character can also leap over buildings, run up walls, and use telekinesis to toss cars effortlessly through the air. This totally changes the pace of the game, and makes simple acts (such as driving motorcycles or hijacking helicopters) seem trivial in the face of awesome super powers. It also leads to amazingly hectic cooperative play, with both players controlling Saints of incredible power running rampant in Steelport. And though the stakes are higher than ever, the game maintains a light, fun tone, proving that even in the face of impossible odds, the Saints are still the funniest criminals in gaming.

▼ Steelport is a warped, digitized version of its former self.

Digital Death
Think this looks weird? Well, you ain't seen nothing yet.

THE MOTLEY CABINET \\

The Saints' leader didn't decide to start playing politics when he was elected to run the country—his presidential cabinet is stacked with gangsters, criminals, hackers, and all manner of thugs. Actually, that's not too different from real-life politics...

You'll need to rescue your homies once things go south, zipping into their own personal digital prisons to recruit them to your side. Once you've rescued them from the Zin they'll be able to help you out as you attempt to save humanity.

Robobattle
Get in your mech and/or robot, and wreak havoc on the Zin.
Corpse Party
You'll slay thousands of aliens by the time the credits roll.

YOU'LL SPEND SOME TIME IN OUTER SPACE, TOO

01 SHIP PLAY
Because being the president isn't enough, you'll also be the captain of a stolen alien ship.

02 SHEP-SURO
Your ship is pretty similar to the Normandy from *Mass Effect*, except with more fart jokes.

YOUR ENEMY AWAITS \\

Emperor Zinyak is the leader of the Zin, and doesn't care for the Saints' way of life. He's more a fan of order, control, and classical music—the sorts of things the Saints (and, by extension, America) strive to destroy. Naturally, he's got to go.

FAST PRESIDENT \\

SUPER SAINT \\

The game takes place inside of a simulation, and as it goes on you'll unlock different powers. This changes the way you play, and within hours you'll give up on driving cars in favor of sprinting so fast you can run on water. Before long you'll be using your telekinesis to throw cars at giant robots—hey, this isn't your granddad's open-world crime game.

A BLAST FROM THE PAST

Remember young Shaundi? Delving into your friend's minds reveals interesting tidbits about their past.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

SAINTS ROW IV

INFO
Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Volition
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
August 20, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player co-op

GENRE
Sandbox

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone looking for a sequel to *Independence Day*

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Amazing humor and great dialogue
- ❤ Exploring is great fun
- ❤ Nearly endless game parodies

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Technical hiccups and freezes
- ✖ Some unlocks come too late

NICK SAYS:
The wacky gang's adventures continue, this time from the White House, and, again, it's a ton of fun.

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

MADDEN NFL 25

A focus on the fundamentals and up-to-the-minute NFL trends powers *Madden* again

• Words: Richard Grisham

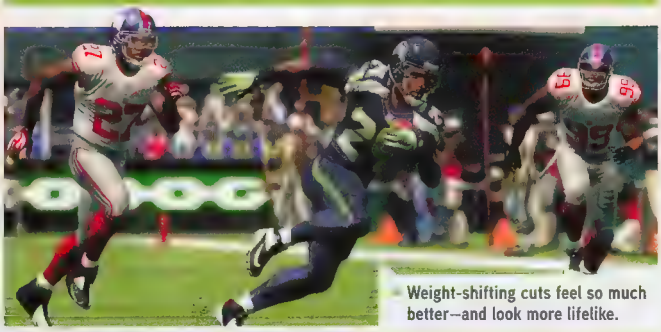
With a quarter-century's worth of games under its belt, nostalgia understandably permeates *Madden NFL 25*. Reminders of bygone days are spliced throughout loading screens, juxtaposed with descriptions of new features designed to keep a yearly iterative release fresh. *Madden* continues to push forward with a host of improvements and features this season—and remains a thoroughly deep, entertaining experience—but there's also no doubt that it's beginning to show its age on the current console generation.

A major focus this year is the running game, from much better blocking to new Run Free controls that open up a host of trucks, stiff-arms, and jukes to counter would-be tacklers. They work very well once you learn the mechanics, but longtime fans will need to take a step back to train themselves; the "hit turbo all the time and hope for the best" approach is not the path to success. The second year of the Infinity Engine also powers some terrific tackling, while a welcome Skills Trainer mode teaches you the ins and outs.

An expanded Connected Franchise mode lets you step into the shoes of an owner, in addition to being a player or a coach. This introduces a slew of options, from finances to media relations and even moving the team. Taking the Rams from St. Louis back to Los Angeles, for example, is devilishly fun, especially as you see and hear media reaction. Unfortunately, some strange behavior emerges as well, from forsaken fans still filling up the stadium in the old city after the announcement to end-zone art bearing the "St. Louis" moniker in a sparkling new Los Angeles stadium.

Madden's core gameplay is the best yet in the series, but its overall presentation trails smooth-as-silk contemporaries such as *NBA 2K* and *MLB The Show*. Yet even though it feels as if *Madden* isn't sewn together as tightly as possible, there's plenty of new and interesting content to have fun with all season long.

Run Free controls will challenge longtime players and newcomers alike, but they also offer exponentially more options than ever. Powerful stiff-arms, jukes, and trucks—when combined with the proper read of a block—are supremely satisfying when pulled off well. While they occasionally generate pinball-like visual effects as runners bounce off tacklers and blockers, the benefits outweigh the drawbacks.



Weight-shifting cuts feel so much better—and look more lifelike.

Wear and tear is more evident with scratched helmets and filthy jerseys.

Defensive players get the benefit of "Heatseeker"-assisted tackling.

OPTION TO DAZZLE

GAME DETAILS

MADDEN NFL 25

NFO
Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: Tiburon
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
August 27, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 6-player online, 4-player local

GENRE
Sports

SUITABLE FOR
Jerry Jones wannabes and Commissioner Goodell haters

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Run-blocking is much, much better
- ❤ Read Option plays are great fun
- ❤ Moving a team across the country—or world

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Transitions are kind of sloppy
- ✖ Physics can cause some bizarre body contortions

CHARLIE SAYS:
Madden keeps getting better, but I worry that the increasing complexity prevents more from playing it.

OVERALL RATING:

4

PIKMAN 3

GAME OF THE MONTH

Intergalactic nurseries ahoy! • Words: Nathan Meunier

When frequent whistle blasts summoning the pint-sized Pikmin platoon, I always feel a tad guilty hurling the crew of colorful space critters at delicious fruit one moment and dangerous foes the next. It's impossible not to get attached to the friendly little buggers and the heartbreak that comes from watching them get gobbled up, drowned, or stamped out of existence is tangible. Much like its predecessors *Pikmin 3* immediately sucks you into its delightful alien realm with cleverly evolving puzzle mechanics and a potent dose of charm.

The biggest difference this time around is you now control a trio of intrepid travelers tasked with exploring the strange planet they've become stranded on and finding a way back home. Overcoming the many obstacles in your path requires the help of a diverse medley of Pikmin pals—including the all-new (and ultra-lovable) rock and winged variations—each of which have unique strengths and abilities. Being able to divide your crew and their Pikmin into up to three squads and swap between them on a whim adds a welcome new layer of strategic multitasking to exploration, puzzling, and foraging for the supplies needed to survive. Thankfully, the ability to pause the action and use the GamePad's map screen to plot out a course for your comrades independently makes them easier to juggle.

Aside from its beautiful photo-realistic designs and distinct natural settings, each sprawling region of the planet has an abundance of fantastic foes to fight, massive boss battles to face, and puzzling missions to chip away at before night falls. The need to constantly hunt down fresh fruit for smoothies to keep your crew from starving also injects a thrilling sense of urgency to each day's adventure, but there's ample reason to return to and uncover all of the tucked-away secrets. *Pikmin 3*'s blissful new outing on the Wii U is well worth the long wait. ©

Nom Nom Nom
The local alien wildlife loves chowing down on your Pikmin friends.
New Crew
Alph is only one of three all-new explorers you get to control.
A PHOTOREALISTIC ALIEN WORLD FULL OF IMAGINATIVE FUN

Buzz Off
These stinging critters are a real thorn in the old side.

BIG BADDIES \\

Pikmin 3's setpiece boss battles pit you against some stunning creatures. From a sand monster that closely resembles the Sarlacc pit creature in Star Wars to a flying invisible manta ray that's sensitive to light, each beastly encounter challenges you to use your Pikmin in creative ways. The good news is even the tougher bosses are somewhat forgiving—you can whomp them, run away, and return before sunset to finish them off.

DEATH FROM ABOVE \\

▼ Give old beaky a taste of his own medicine with a swarm of flying Pikmin.

MULTIPLAYER MADNESS \\

Among *Pikmin 3*'s splitscreen multiplayer options, Bingo Mode returns with a fever, pitting you and a couchmate against one another to scavenge fruit, battle beasties, and score the goods you need to shout *BINGO*! It's a crazy, fun scramble to be sure.

GAME DETAILS

Wii U

EVERYONE 10+
E
10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PIKMIN 3

INFO
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Platforms: Wii U

RELEASE DATE
August 4, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player local competitive and co-op

GENRE
Action-strategy

SUITABLE FOR
People who "squee" at the sight of cute things; Nintendo fans tired of regular old Mario and pals

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Beautiful, photorealistic level designs
- ❤ New Pikmin add to the puzzles
- ❤ Spectacular boss encounters

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ The story campaign is on the short side
- ✖ Herding large numbers of Pikmin gets stressful

ANDY SAYS:
I've really missed these little critters. Wow, has it really been nine years since *Pikmin 2* came out?

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

THE BUREAU: XCOM DECLASSIFIED

An alien invasion brings the Cold War to a flash boil • Words: Alex Roth

It's 1962 and an invasion is on. Little gray men have touched down with plans more sinister than some light probing, and it's up to agent William Carter to turn them back. A G-Man of his day, Carter barks orders in a pack-a-day rumble of a voice, leading his three-man squad of Bureau agents to tactical victory against the alien horde. These are the Mulders and Scullys of the *Mad Men* era, government suits in snap-brim hats and shiny black shoes with laces, packing weapons both domestic and extraterrestrial.

Whereas last year's *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* was a top-down, turn-based game, *The Bureau: XCOM Declassified* is a third-person shooting affair. It cribs heavily from the *Mass Effect 2* handbook, even going so far as to imitate that game's climax.

Despite moments of lip service to McCarthyism and an alien interrogation that offers branching dialogue choices, this is a straightforward action game. *The Bureau* milks the vintage setting for charm, filling the wood-paneled offices of your home base with cigarette smoke and typewriter jockeys that want you to give E.T. a "shiner" for them. Ultimately, though, this treatment is only skin deep; the grunts on your side lose the period dialogue when they're pinned down by laser fire.

This *XCOM* outing is neither as mechanically sound nor as emotionally involving as the third-person titles it apes, but those with a love for B-movie schlock will dig the setting. Just don't expect tongue-in-cheek humor from this dour invasion.

Shoot first, ask the big questions later.

COVER-BASED COVER-UP \\

When the phase rays start flying, there's no better defense than hunkering down and picking your shots. The Bureau is built around a familiar cover system and time can be slowed down to issue orders to your two squadmates. This makes for some satisfying tactical takedowns, such as stripping an alien mech of its armor before targeting the squishy pilot inside, but micromanagement fatigue sets in after reminding your Support man to use his shield for the umpteenth time. Clunky menus and controls make for a dense chain of command.

▲ Nothing stops an alien death ray like an American-made automobile.

**NOT MASSIVELY EFFECTIVE ** The Bureau's squad-based combat takes inspiration from BioWare's epic sci-fi series, Mass Effect. It could've used a little more time poring over the intel though. The controls can be finicky, which is no fun under heavy enemy fire, and it's hard to tell if your dialogue choices make any difference. Also, zoos on the alien homeworld must be painfully dull, because the enemy hasn't mustered a very colorful invasion force. The weapons lack variety, too.

EXTRATERRESTRIAL ACTIVITIES

Seasoned AI agents can be sent on solo missions. You'll miss their support on the battlefield, but they'll return with game-changing intel on the enemy. Just make sure to maintain a stable of effective fighters. Agent deaths are permanent; send too many folded flags home to war widows and it's game over, man.

▲ We thought we were alone in the universe, and we liked it that way.

▲ *Nighthawks*, eat your heart out!

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

THE BUREAU: XCOM DECLASSIFIED

INFO
Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: 2K Marin
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
August 20, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Third-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Outcasts from *This Island Earth* or N7 agents with downtime to fill

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Tense tactical showdowns
- ❤ Sci-fi and the '60s are a perfect match
- ❤ Sharp graphics and stylish visual panache

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ No multiplayer offering
- ✖ Easy to get bogged down in combat menus when issuing orders

CHARLIE SAYS:
The gameplay may not live up to last year's stellar *Enemy Unknown*, but the setting is still a cool choice.

OVERALL RATING:

3

TALES OF XILLIA

Another enjoyable, but not too deep, entry in the *Tales* series

• Words: Kat Bailey

GAME DETAILS

TALES OF XILLA

INFO
Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: Namco Tales Studio
Platforms: PS3

RELEASE DATE
August 6, 2013

NUMBER OF PLAYERS
Single-player only

GENRE
RPG

SUITABLE FOR
Teens

Tales of Xillia can hardly be accused of being boring. Before receiving even so much as a proper introduction, heroes Jude and Milla are on the run from the law, hopping from village to village as they try to recover Milla's lost powers. It's an opening very much in keeping with *Xillia*'s fast-paced approach to roleplaying, which includes combo-fest battles that eschew turn-based strategy for action, and very simple customization based on advancing around a loop of unlockable abilities. *Xillia* rarely stops to catch its breath, which is to its benefit and detriment, since it's exciting, but also not terribly deep.

COMBAT NEVER REALLY GETS BORING

The uneasy relationship between depth and raw action is most evident in the combat, which is focused on linking characters together and filling up a meter with basic attacks. These lead to Link Artes—super moves triggered by using an attack that matches your AI partner, which can eventually be strung together for maximum damage. That's about as deep as the combat goes, but simple as it is, it never really becomes boring. As it turns out, building up and releasing Link Arte combos is satisfying enough that *Xillia* can get away with a certain lack of in-depth strategy, and the remarkably quick battles make up for everything else.

As for the rest of *Tales of Xillia*, your mileage will vary heavily depending on whether or not you like anime. Most notably, the *Tales* series has never been shy about relying on anime cliches, and they're in full force here. Otherwise, it's fast, attractive, and most importantly, easy to learn. It can be pretty shallow at times, but in this case, action ultimately wins out.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Fast pace keeps it from becoming repetitive
- Big, interesting world with lots to do
- Battle system mixes action with just enough strategy to be fun

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- The combat and story can feel shallow

CHARLIE SAYS:
It's a solid new entry...in a *very* specific niche. You already know if it's for you.

OVERALL RATING:

▼ *Tales of Xillia* has a strong reliance on fast-paced action.

TWICE THE CHARM?

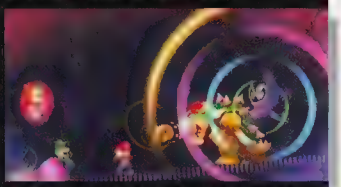
Tales of Xillia features two protagonists, the scholarly Jude Mathis and the godlike Milla Maxwell, and it's up to you who to follow. It's an idea that could increase *Xillia*'s replayability but sadly, Jude and Milla are rarely apart, so the difference is barely noticeable. It's a missed opportunity

MARIO & LUIGI: DREAM TEAM

Mr. Jumpman bring me a dream · Words: Nick Pino

It figures...even on vacation Mario can't catch a break. *Mario & Luigi: Dream Team* has the eponymous brothers relaxing on the sunny beaches of Pi'illo Island, a place of serenity and ancient culture—most of which involves taking a good long nap. There's a long spiel about Antasma, the evil Bat King, taking hold of the island's inhabitants and encasing them in eternal nightmare, and his light-side counterpart Prince Dreambert, but like the dozens of *Mario* titles we've come to love, it all comes down to one woman: Princess Peach. Antasma steals her away and it's up to the green- and red-garbed brothers to do what they do best—save the day.

The *Mario & Luigi* series is known for two rock-steady cornerstones: its turn-based, timing-critical battle system and a penchant for hilarious dialogue that's near impossible to dislike. *Dream Team* has both in spades. What it doesn't have, though, is a great deal more to offer than 2009's *Bowser's Inside Story*. Sure, Luiginary works and Luiginary attacks (special moves only available in the copious Luigi dream levels that require you to shake and shimmy the 3DS to power-up the green-clad bro) add something special to the fourth entry in the series, but if you're not a role-playing fanatic, you may find the game's lethargic pacing and overly verbose text bubbles putting you to sleep.



What happens when Bowser teams up with Antasma? All heck breaks loose.

Pi'ilo Island provided the ideal setting for the game's...*unique* brand of humor.

DON'T TOUCH ME, BRO! \\

As strange as this sounds, you'll need to touch Luigi's face to solve most of the game's 2D platforming/puzzle segments. Need to get up higher? Use Luigi's 'stache for a boost. See those blocks floating in the background? Just tickle his nose to unleash a forceful sneeze.

3DS

GAME DETAILS

MARIO & LUIGI: DREAM TEAM

INFO
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: AlphaDream Corporation
Platforms: Nintendo 3DS

RELEASE DATE
August 11, 2013

MULTIPLAYER MODE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action-RPG

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone who's ever dreamed of electric cheep-cheep

WHAT'S GREAT:
- The timing-critical combat system kept the game feeling fresh
- Crazy, kooky humor
- Huge aesthetic leap over prior DS entries

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- The plethora of overly verbose chat bubbles

ANDY SAYS:
M&L always bring the fun, though there's a bit of work (and reading dialogue bubbles) for it to get going.

OVERALL RATING:

4

XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS

KILLER IS DEAD

INFO
Publisher: Xseed Games
Developer: Grasshopper Manufacture
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
August 27, 2013

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Suda51 followers, hack-n-slash gurus

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Vibrant visuals across diverse terrain
- ❤ Distinctive tone sets it apart from genre

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Combat turns rote and dull before long
- ✖ Some content demeaning to women

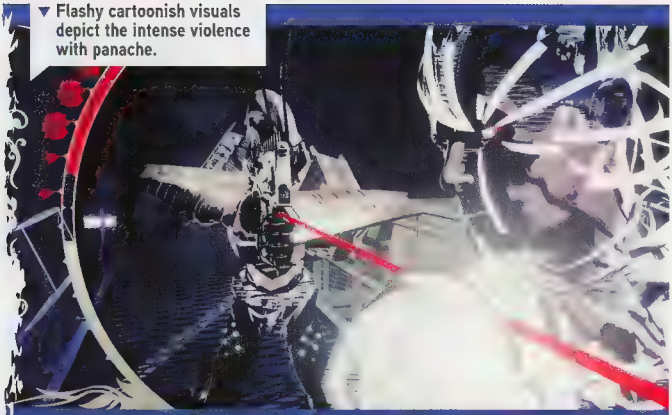
ANDY SAYS:
As quirky as you'd expect—though the misogynistic missions are upsetting.

OVERALL RATING:

3

OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE GAMER

▼ Flashy cartoonish visuals depict the intense violence with panache.



KILLER IS DEAD

More style than substance \\ Words: Andrew Hayward

Many modern action games feature a dynamic mix of hack-n-slash action and gunplay, but *Killer is Dead* might be the only one to include battles on the moon against a half-naked tyrant, plus interactions with a runaway train that speaks and has a human-like face. Like Goichi "Suda51" Suda's earlier titles, including *No More Heroes* and *Lollipop Chainsaw*, this visually lush affair focuses on ultra-violent combat—complete with blood-soaked decapitations—and dabbles in surreal scenarios, sexual innuendo, and amusingly goofy dialogue.

As professional hitman Mondo Zappa you'll carry out a number of execution contracts using your samurai sword and cyborg gun-arm, with the diverse terrain and bizarre interactions delivering the most interesting moments, thanks to the dazzling cel-shaded look and vibrant coloring. However, the blade-centric action feels very repetitive, thanks to limited moves and enemies alike, the narrative is scattershot, and the game misfires severely with repulsive side missions (see sidebar) that are degrading to women.

Recent genre leaders—such as *DmC: Devil May Cry* and *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*—deftly blended the weird and wonderful, but for *Killer is Dead*, just being weird isn't enough to impress.

SHAME GAME

Killer is Dead features a tacky series of "Mondo Girls" missions, in which you take a woman out for a date and then progress the scenario by staring at her cleavage and other risqué areas when she's not looking. Suggestive content is one thing, but this sends a disgusting and embarrassing message.

▲ Oddball characters? Just par for the course in a Suda51 creation.

▲ Mondo's gun-arm offers a ranged attack to supplement his sword.

PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES 2

The tale of a taco that time forgot... • Words: Andy Eddy

If you got caught up in the *Plants vs. Zombies* wave, you'll welcome the new, free-to-play *Plants vs. Zombies 2*, which offers significantly freshened gameplay thanks to PopCap adding numerous upgrades and enhancements.

The additions of plant food (the form of "alt fire" that'll cause the plant you use it on to hyper-perform for a few seconds) and timed power-ups (to pinch zombie heads off, zap them with chain lightning, or flick them back or off the board with your finger) offer you strategic options for defensive and offensive action against the zombie horde. Experimenting with them is half the fun.

PopCap has separated the initial action into three themed worlds: Ancient Egypt, Pirates, and Wild West. Each world has unique variations that slightly break it out of the standard grid playfield, such as the missing sections in Pirates' plank lanes that you can't plant on and which zombies can swing over with a rope. Once you've unlocked a world, you can move from level to level earning stars to aid your progress and putting coins in your bank. And challenge worlds change up the gameplay even more, such as the card-matching game you play with zombies carrying terra-cotta plaques. The objective-based levels were the most fun for me, such as having to win the level using a limited amount of sun or with under 10 plants. They'll get you thinking a bit more than the initial game.

It's clear that PvZ2 was designed to play on a tablet—you can drag your finger to collect all sun and coins, or plant a new weapon by swiping from the planter to the playfield. While the gameplay has a sameness throughout, there's enough variety and challenge to keep you going—until PopCap has new worlds for you to enjoy.

The Coconut Cannon clears a 3x3 area after its shot strikes a zombie.

PLANT PROS AND ZOMBIE CONS \\

GAME DETAILS

PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES 2

NI-U
Publisher: PopCap
Developer: PopCap
Platforms: iOS, Android (other platforms TBA)
Reviewed on: iOS

RELEASE DATE
Release date: August 15, 2013 (iOS); early fall 2013 (Android)

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Strategy

SUITABLE FOR
Vegetarians who want to punish myriad meaty undead

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Free to play
- Challenge modes vary gameplay
- Some enemies require different strategy

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Gameplay still pretty repetitive
- Some items you can only get by buying

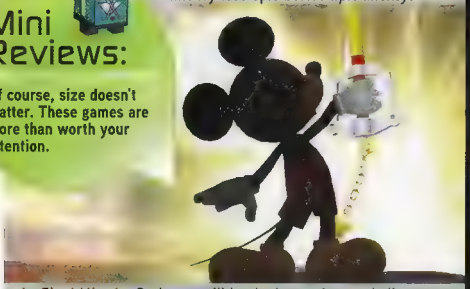
NICK SAYS:
Adding plant food and power-ups was a great way to enhance gameplay—but they may be too powerful.

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

Mini Reviews:

Of course, size doesn't matter. These games are more than worth your attention.



Mickey was epic before *Epic Mickey*.

In *Final Mix*, the Cerberus will be the least of your challenges.

KINGDOM HEARTS HD 1.5 REMIX

EVERYONE 10+ — E10+ — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

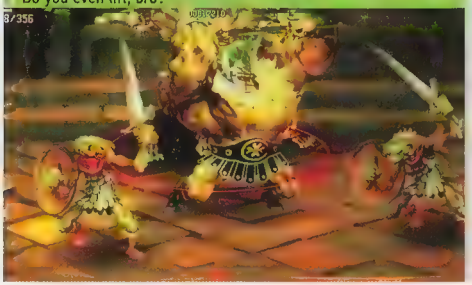
Publisher: Square Enix • **Developer:** Square Enix • **Platforms:** PS3 • **Words:** Miguel Concepcion

Experiencing *Kingdom Hearts* in HD is like catching up with an old friend who's become more attractive with age. With a crossover combo of classic Disney and cutesy *Final Fantasy* characters, this collection couldn't be more endearing. The menu-dependent, real-time combat isn't for everyone, but its faithfulness will please longtime fans. The second game is an HD version of *KH: Re: Chain of Memories*, and its inventive card-based combat remains intact. Two full games are a great value, but it'd be nice if the included *Kingdom Hearts 358/2* content was more than just a series of cutscenes. Still, of the many HD collections out there, *Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 Remix* ranks among the prettiest.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only
GENRE Action-RPG
RELEASE DATE
September 10, 2013
SUITABLE FOR
Crossover maniacs, Nomura admirers

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

The painterly visuals are spectacular, no doubt about it.



Do you even lift, bro?

DRAGON'S CROWN

TEEN T — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Atlus • **Developer:** Vanillaware • **Platforms:** PS3, PS Vita • **Words:** Alexandra Hall

It's tricky to blend genres, but celebrated 'benders like *Symphony of the Night* and *Deus Ex* show the payoff can be extraordinary. Alas, Vanillaware's hybrid beat-em-up/RPG *Dragon's Crown* excels at neither RPGing nor face-punching.

It disappoints as an arcade game, because the chaotic brawling feels lightweight and spammy, and isn't very skill-based: If at first you fail, level up until you can win. Yet the RPG bits fail to compensate, with positively boring loot and near-imperceptible character advancement. PS3's awkward analog-stick cursor system also grates, with the more slowdown-prone Vita game offering a superior touch interface.

Dragon's Crown is remarkably beautiful, but I'd trade all those sumptuous pixels in a second for a game that managed to keep me interested.

Up to 4-player local and online
Action-RPG

August 6, 2013

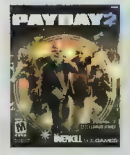
Capcom arcade lovers, D&D fans

OVERALL RATING: 3

PAYDAY 2

Publisher: 505 Games • Developer: Overkill Software
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC • Words: Scott Butterworth

Though the unhelpful AI makes solo play painfully frustrating, *Payday 2*'s online co-op tweaks the usual horde formula in some genuinely clever ways. You can now scout every location anonymously before manually donning a mask and starting the heist. You can also trade any hostages you hogtie for downed friends, as allies are captured rather than killed. The devs even changed the mission structure, allowing you to select from multiple jobs displayed on a city map. All these welcome, new ideas complement the inherent fun of the frantic gameplay, but unfortunately, unlocking new missions (as well as new weapons and skills) takes far too long, weapons feel obnoxiously weak, and lackluster tech and graphics drag the whole experience down. The flaws aren't ruinous, but they are pervasive. The results: middling.



MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player co-op online
First-person shooter

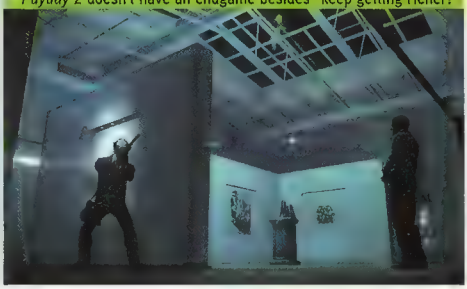
August 13, 2013

Law-abiding criminals, *Left 4 Dead* fans

OVERALL RATING:
3.5

Levels get reused, but certain aspects are randomized each time.

Payday 2 doesn't have an endgame besides "keep getting richer!"



SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI IV

Publisher: Atlus • Developer: Atlus •
Platforms: 3DS • Words: Heidi Kemps

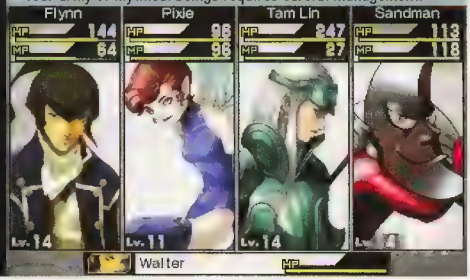
The first few hours of *Shin Megami Tensei IV* are among the most tense you'll encounter in an RPG. As a Samurai chosen to protect the people, you must combat the demons threatening society by convincing them to join your cause—a task where one bad response can spell your death. Even with a full demon army, however, SMT4 is a challenge. Swords, skills, and spells must be carefully cultivated with training and strategy to survive in the depths of Naraku and the forsaken world beyond. It's not as user-friendly as the Persona series (and the cast isn't nearly as charming), but it offers a riveting story filled with tough choices and some of the most rewarding gameplay of any RPG this year.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only
GENRE
RPG
RELEASE DATE
July 16, 2013
SUITABLE FOR
Demon negotiators

OVERALL RATING:
4.25

Demon lairs look...unsettling, to say the least.

Your army of mythical beings requires careful management.



Drill and blast your way through ancient temples and steal the cool stuff.

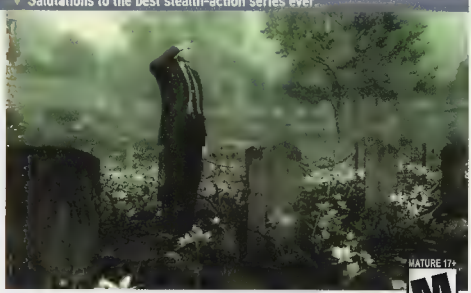
PHINEAS AND FERB: QUEST FOR COOL STUFF

Publisher: Majesco Entertainment Developer: Behaviour
Platforms: Xbox 360, Wii U, Wii, 3DS • Words: Jack DeVries

Quest for Cool Stuff plays like an intro course on sides-crollers. You explore and find loot, garbed in a robotic mech suit. Upgrades enable opening new pathways in previous levels. *Quest* pays homage to Mario- and Samus-hosted platformers, but can't match their gameplay quality.

OVERALL RATING: 3

Salutations to the best stealth-action series ever.



METAL GEAR SOLID: THE LEGACY COLLECTION

Publisher: Konami • Developer: Kojima Productions
Platforms: PS3 • Words: Ryan Scott

If you've missed the past 15 years of *Metal Gear Solid*, this anthology collects the entire series—even the MSX2 games and *MGS1*'s VR Missions expansion—to create the definitive edition of gaming's greatest stealth-action saga. Just make sure to play everything in release order to avoid mass confusion!

OVERALL RATING: 4.75

Papa Smurf always says, "If you can't Smurf something nice..."

THE SMURFS 2

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: WayForward
Platforms: Xbox 360, PS3, Wii U, Wii • Words: David Chapman

Based on their most recent big-screen romp, *The Smurfs 2* has the Smurfs running, jumping, and dodging on a repetitive globetrotting mission to rescue Smurfette. Although it falls short of being *smurftacular*, the co-op multiplayer is enough fun to break its monotony. Younger fans should enjoy beating challenges, collecting Smurf coins, and unlocking new Smurfs.

OVERALL RATING: 3

Whoa! I know Kung Fu!

THE SMURFS 2

Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: WayForward
Platforms: DS Words: David Chapman

The Smurfs 2 for DS is read like an interactive storybook, retelling the plot from the movie. You'll discover nine different minigames, which can be replayed as often as you like. Extra options and collectibles can be unlocked, but the light amount of actual gaming content is only enough to appeal to kids with attention spans as long as a Smurf is tall.

OVERALL RATING: 2.5

▼ I'm going to level with you: *Laval* is kinda cool in a cheesy way.

LEGO LEGENDS OF CHIMA: LAVAL'S JOURNEY

Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive • Developer: TT Games • Platforms: 3DS, PS Vita • Words: Dave Rudden

The best *LEGO* games have a solid foundation of a great license and fun local multiplayer. *LEGO Legends of Chima: Laval's Journey* has neither, and dull combat, oft-confusing puzzles, and easy-to-miss prompts derail it further. If your kids are crazy for the CG cartoons, though, add a half-point.

OVERALL RATING: 2.75

▼ It's the tale of two cities...and three armies.

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION V: BRAVE NEW WORLD

Publisher: 2K Games • Developer: Firaxis Games • Platforms: PC Words: Ben Kim

Civilization V is a great game hampered only by the lack of a meaningful endgame. All-out war is fun, but so are culture and diplomacy. Brave New World makes victory mean more than mutually assured destruction. Oh, and the addition of nine new civilizations doesn't hurt things either.

OVERALL RATING: 4

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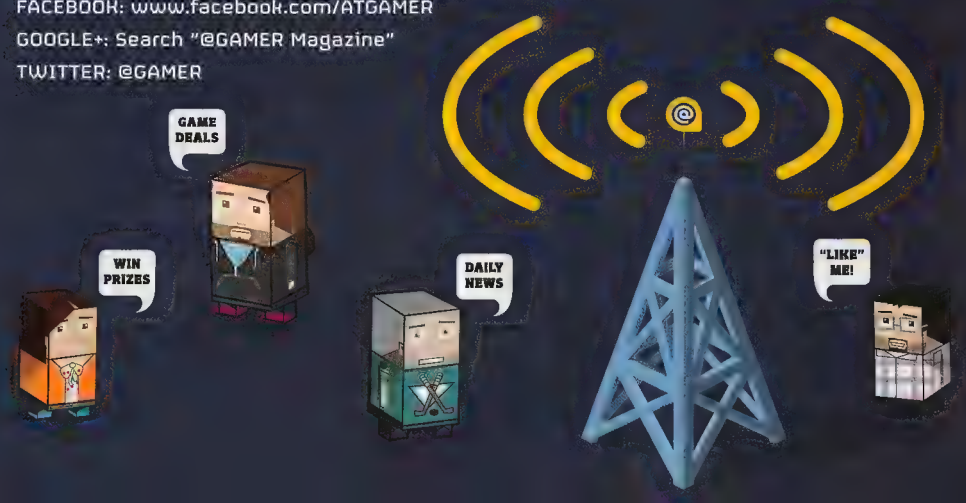
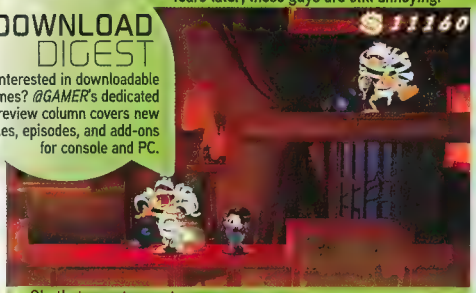


Words: Ryan Scott

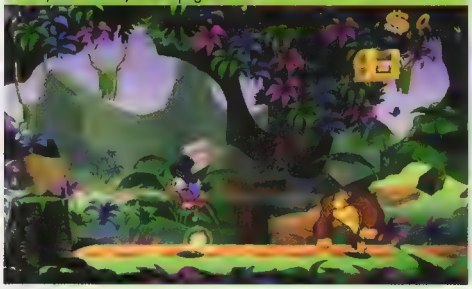
DOWNLOAD DIGEST

Interested in downloadable games? *@GAMER*'s dedicated review column covers new titles, episodes, and add-ons for console and PC.

Years later, these guys are still annoying.



Oh, that sweet, sweet pogo cane.



DUCKTALES REMASTERED

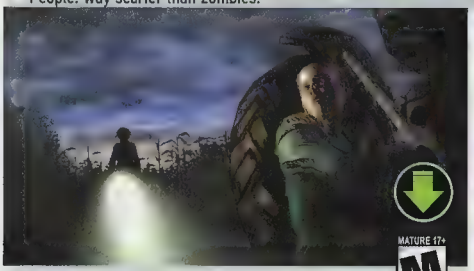
Publisher: Capcom • Developer: WayForward Technologies • Price: $15 • PSN/Wii U/PC (August 20, 2013), XBLA (September 11, 2013)

Back when licensed games were an even crummier proposition than they typically are today, Capcom's 8-bit *DuckTales* was the standard bearer for what a well-developed tie-in could achieve—kinda like the *Batman: Arkham Asylum* of its day. This HD refresh preserves the classic game's considerable sidescrolling challenges, and handily outdoes the original's boss battles with much trickier versions. Suffice to say, if you aren't acclimated to NES-era difficulty, *DuckTales* could catch you off-guard, even on its default setting.

And of course, it pays much closer homage to Disney's beloved animated series. It feels like a lost *DuckTales* episode—with Uncle Scrooge, his adventurous nephews, and a supporting cast voiced by their original '80s actors. Purists might scoff at copious cinematics and dialogue as they send Scrooge pogo-caning across largely reimagined levels against myriad enemies, but the additions are charming and easy to like. Plus, you get to swim around in Scrooge's giant money bin. If that doesn't bring you instant joy, nothing will.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

People: way scarier than zombies.



THE WALKING DEAD: 400 DAYS

Publisher/Developer: Telltale Games • Price: $5 Platforms: PSN/XBLA/PC (July 2, 2013)

Telltale's acclaimed first season of its *Walking Dead* tie-in adventure game is wrapped, but plenty more tales are left to tell in Robert Kirkman's zombie-ravaged world. The single-shot *400 Days* episode takes an anthology approach, spinning five short survivor stories and then tying them all up in a short epilogue. Each tale is laced with signature moral choices, though they're all too short. I hope Telltale co-opts *400 Days*' narrative style for a lengthier second season.

OVERALL RATING: 3.5

Yep, still just as cheesy as ever.

LEISURE SUIT LARRY: RELOADED

Publisher: Replay Games • Developer: N-Fusion Interactive • Price: $20 • Platforms: PC/Mac (June 27, 2013)

For all of Sierra Online's forward-thinking successes, its games really were products of their time. Case in point: This HD remake of the titular *Leisure Suit Larry*'s original risque point-and-click adventure might come across as entirely quaint, depending on your history. And while it doesn't have the same timeless quality as something like *Monkey Island*, *Larry* is a few fun hours of tricky (yet mostly fair) puzzles and super-corny humor. For old PC warriors, it's a tacky trip down memory lane.

OVERALL RATING: 3.25

ROGUE LEGACY

Publisher/Developer: Cellar Door Games • Price: $15 • Platforms: PC (June 27, 2013)

Rogue Legacy is such an ingenious idea, I can't help but wonder how no one came up with it sooner. It's a sidescrolling, exploration-heavy action-adventure game, fused with the perma-death and procedural terrain generation of your average roguelike. Yes, to be really clear on that, you only get one life—and the massive castle you're tasked with exploring changes with every new game.

The *really* clever part is *Rogue Legacy*'s sense of progression. You gain levels and equipment that persist through each playthrough, with new characters (you get a choice of three, each with random stats and perks) being framed as descendants of your prior explorers. Slowly but surely, you can spend accrued gold to unlock new abilities, stat bonuses, and potential character classes to add to each game's random pool. Once you get through the first few inevitably difficulty rounds and peel back a couple of its layers, *Rogue Legacy* becomes a fantastic challenge that imparts a strong sense of continuity without sacrificing much of the roguelike genre's signature brutality. It's one of the most unique and enjoyable gaming surprises of the year.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

This is totally an easy room.

This, however, is *not*.

Possibly the greatest 16-bit RPG ever made.

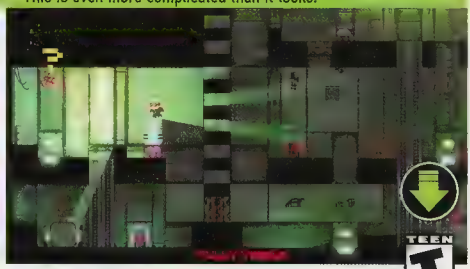
EARTHBOUND

Publisher: Nintendo Developer: Ape/HAL Laboratory Price: $10 Platforms: Wii U Virtual Console (July 18, 2013)

EarthBound is one of the purest embodiments of "critically acclaimed, commercially disastrous" syndrome. This odd, modern-era RPG (originally on Super NES) involves a wild alien-stomping quest through Japan's interpretation of '50s Charles Schulz-ian America, spoofing everything from its obvious *Dragon Quest*-inspired touchstones, to *The Stepford Wives*, to (quite disturbingly) the works of H.P. Lovecraft. It's timeless and peculiar—easily one of the greatest RPGs ever.

OVERALL RATING: 5.0

This is even more complicated than it looks.



STEALTH INC.: A CLONE IN THE DARK

Publisher: Sony • Developer: Curve Studios • Price: $10 • Platforms: PSN (July 23, 2013)

While it's not as sophisticated as, say, *Mark of the Ninja*, *Stealth Inc.: A Clone in the Dark* is a pretty decent take on stealth-based puzzle-platforming. It finds you using shadows and other forms of concealment to your advantage as you evade deadly cameras and lasers, tripping switches and pushing boxes to clear a path to the exit door. The difficulty ramps up way more quickly than one might expect, but it results in one fine brainteaser.

OVERALL RATING: 3.5

A-Z OF @GAMER RATINGS

GAME/PRODUCT	ISSUE #	SCORE OUT OF 5
Adventure Time: Hey Ice King, Why'd You Steal Our Garbage?	26	3.75
Aliens: Colonial Marines	27	3.0
Anarchy Reigns	26	3.5
Animal Crossing: New Leaf	31	4.25
Army of Two The Devil's Cartel	29	2.5
Assassin's Creed III (Wii U)	26	4.5
Batman: Arkham City —Armored Edition	26	4.75
The Bureau: XCOM Declassified	32	3.0
BioShock Infinite	28	5.0
Brain Age: Concentration Training	27	4.25
Call of Duty: Black Ops II	25	4.5
Call of Duty: Black Ops II (Wii U)	26	4.25
Castlevania: Lords of Shadow—Mirror of Fate	28	4.5
Civilization V: Brave New World	32	4.0
The Croods: Prehistoric Party!	29	3.0
Company of Heroes 2	31	4.5
Crysis 3	27	4.0
Darksiders II (Wii U)	26	4.5
Dead Island Riptide	29	3.75
Dead or Alive 5 Plus	29	4.0
Dead Space 3	27	3.75
Deadly Premonition: The Director's Cut	29	4.25
Deadpool	31	4.5
Defiance	29	4.0
Disney Epic Mickey: Power of Illusion	25	5.0
Disney Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two (Wii U)	26	3.0
DmC: Devil May Cry	27	4.75
Donkey Kong Country Returns 3D	30	3.75
Dragon's Crown	32	3.0
Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen	29	4.25
Dust 514	31	4.0
Etrian Odyssey IV: Legends of the Titan	28	4.5
Fire Emblem: Awakening	27	4.5
Fist of the North Star: Ken's Rage 2	27	3.25
Funky Barn	26	3.0
Fuse	30	3.5
Game & Wario	31	4.25
Game Party Champions	26	2.5
Gears of War: Judgment	28	4.5
God of War: Ascension	28	4.5
Grid 2	31	4.0
Guacamelee	29	4.5
The Hip Hop Dance Experience	26	3.5
Hitman HD: Trilogy	27	4.0
Injustice: Gods Among Us	29	4.25
Killer is Dead	32	3.0
Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 Remix	32	4.5
The Last of Us	31	5.0
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes (Wii U)	31	4.0
LEGO City Undercover	28	4.25
LEGO City Undercover: The Chase Begins	29	2.75
LEGO Legends of Chima: Laval's Journey	32	2.75
LEGO The Lord of the Rings	26	4.0
LittleBigPlanet Karting	25	4.5
Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon	28	4.0
Madden NFL 13 (Wii U)	26	3.75
Madden NFL 25	32	4.0
Mario & Luigi: Dream Team	32	4.0
Marvel Avengers: Battle for Earth (Wii U)	26	2.75
Mass Effect 3 (Wii U)	26	4.75
Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance	27	4.5
Metal Gear Solid: The Legacy Collection	32	4.75
Metro: Last Light	30	4.5
Midway Arcade Origins	26	4.0
MLB 13 The Show	28	4.0
MLB 2K13	28	2.5
Monster Hunter 3 Ultimate	28	4.25
Naruto Powerful Shippuden	27	4.0
Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm 3	27	3.5
NBA 2K13 (Wii U)	26	4.25
NCAA Football 14	31	4.25
Need for Speed Most Wanted U	28	4.75
Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch	26	4.25
NIKE+ Kinect Training	26	4.25
Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge	29	3.5
Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2 Plus	28	3.0
Omerta: City of Gangsters	27	4.5
Pandora's Tower	29	3.5
Paper Mario: Sticker Star	25	4.0
Payday 2	32	3.5
Persona 4 Golden	26	4.5
Phineas and Ferb: Quest for Cool Stuff	32	3.0
Pikmin 3	32	4.5
Plants vs. Zombies 2	32	4.5
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Gate to Infinity	29	2.75
Power Rangers Super Samurai	26	3.0
Project X Zone	31	3.75
Ratchet & Clank: Full Frontal Assault	26	3.25
Remember Me	30	3.75
Resident Evil: Revelations	30	4.0
Resident Evil 6 (PC)	29	4.0
Rift Storm Legion	25	4.25
Saints Row IV	32	4.5
Scribblenauts Unlimited	26	4.5
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner: Soul Hackers	29	3.75
Shin Megami Tensei IV	32	4.25
SimCity	28	4.5
The Sims 3 Island Paradise	31	4.0
The Sims 3 Seasons	26	3.0
The Sims 3 University Life	28	4.5
Skylanders Giants (Wii U)	26	4.0
Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time	27	4.75
The Smurfs 2 (consoles)	32	3.0
The Smurfs 2 (DS)	32	2.5
Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2	29	3.0
Sniper Elite V2 (Wii U)	31	3.25
Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed	26	4.0
Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed (3DS)	27	3.75
Soul Sacrifice	29	3.75
Splinter Cell Blacklist	32	4.25
StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm	29	4.5
Star Trek: The Video Game	30	3.0
Super Monkey Ball Banana Splitz	26	3.5
Tales of Xillia	32	3.5
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 14	28	4.0
Tomb Raider	27	4.5
Transformers Prime	26	2.5
The Walking Dead	26	4.5
The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct	29	2.5
Warriors Orochi 3 Hyper	26	3.25
Your Shape: Fitness Evolved 2013	26	3.5
ZombiU	25	4.0

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GEAR

Where to purchase?
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90 Ouya Console
92 Skullcandy PLYR1 Wireless Headset
93 Turtle Beach PX22 Headset
94 Logitech G700s Rechargeable Gaming Mouse
95 SteelSeries APEX Raw Gaming Keyboard

• Photos: Samantha Berg

NICK SAYS:

I like to think that I'm a patient person, but waiting to get my hands on the Ouya after I saw its Kickstarter more than a year ago almost killed me. An Android-based gaming console with a massive library of games, all of which would have a significant demo free to try? It sounded too good to be true...and as it turns out, maybe it was.

OUYA? IT'S ALL RIGHT

A hands-on with the little console that could

Words: Nick Pino

01
TOUCHING SENTIMENT
I loved using the touchpad for browsing the Web...but it wasn't all that helpful for anything else.

02
IT'S MULTI, PLAYER!
The system supports up to four Ouya controllers, but can also use wired Xbox 360 or PS3 pads.

03
PORTABLE AND PORT-A-FUL
The system packs USB 2.0, Micro USB, Ethernet, and HDMI ports with room to spare on its backside.

OUYA GAMING CONSOLE
Manufacturer: Ouya
www.ouya.tv
Price: $99.99
OVERALL SCORE: 3.25

While Microsoft and Sony were caught up in a whirlwind of next-gen console specs and first-party exclusives, something revolutionary happened: Gamers started embracing the mobile world. And now the Ouya—the world's first indie, crowdsourced console—has arrived. The aesthetically gorgeous, moderately powerful console (it has a built-in quad-core CPU and 1GB of memory) is a near open-source platform similar to the Google Play Store, but connects to your TV via HDMI. Games all cost under $20 and each are required to have a demo, so you can try before you buy. I found the Ouya's interface to be incredibly intuitive, finding everything from Twitch.tv, to a built-in web browser, and even a few emulators, all in its expansive storefront. That's the good news.

The system's flaws, though, are tough to ignore. The controller is, by all definitions, mediocre (see the numbered breakdown for specifics). You'll adjust to it over time, but you can be sure your initial knee-jerk reaction won't be a pleasant one. Because it's Android-powered, developers are more easily able to get their content onto your device—so while there are more games available to play, it's a lot of shovelware with a few gems mixed in. It won't play every Android game and, perhaps understandably, won't connect to your Google Play account to transfer any products you may have already purchased between the two platforms. If nothing else, though, the Ouya should be looked at as a successful venture into the indie game space, and the result is a system built for ephemeral fun.

04
TRIGGER HAPPY
Mushy triggers were, by far, my least favorite component of the controller.

FINAL FANTASY III

Developer: Square Enix, Matrix Software • Price: $15.99

Though this 3D remake came out on the Nintendo DS back in 2006, this is the first appearance of the once Japan-exclusive game on a non-handheld console.

TOWERFALL

Developer: Matt Makes Games, Inc. • Price: $14.99

TowerFall is what *Super Smash Bros.* would've played like if it was made in the '80s and only had archers. It's maddening at best, and made only more fun with friends.

ITTLE DEW

Developer: Ludosity • Price: $13.99

Ittle Dew pays homage to *The Legend of Zelda* games it derives its intricate puzzle-solving and intrepid adventuring from. If you buy one game on Ouya, make it this one.

PLYR1 WIRELESS GAMING HEADSET
Manufacturer: Skullcandy
www.skullcandy.com
Price: $179.99
OVERALL SCORE: 4.5

01
UNDER CONTROL
Though unintuitive at first, I eventually made peace with the PLYR1's unruly control stick.

02
TAKING A STAND
Slim and sleek, the PLYR1's port-packed stand is the epitome of form and function.

MAKE NO BONE ABOUT IT

Astro's acquisition creates a killer set of cans • Words: Nick Pino

Before last year, Skullcandy and Astro Gaming, the team behind the wonderful Astro A40s (4.5, @GAMER #21), were two separate entities. But in 2012, Skullcandy acquired the top-tier peripheral manufacturer and began work on its own line of gaming cans. The PLYR1s are the result of that union. For all intents and purposes, think of the PLYR1 as a stellar midrange option between the wired Skullcandy SLYR and the feature-rich Astro A50—an affordable, quality option with all the pack-ins that you'd expect in a headset twice its price.

Setup took mere minutes and once it got going, the crystal-clear highs and rumbly lows quickly made this one of my favorite headsets of all time. The only quirk was in the form of the circle pad-esque control located on the right speaker. Though it enabled on-the-fly balancing between in-game and voice-chat volume, I felt like I was in constant contention with this all-too-sensitive control. Other than that, this durable, comfy set is worth every penny.

TURTLE BEACH EAR FORCE PX22 GAMING HEADSET

Manufacturer: Turtle Beach
www.turtlebeach.com
Price: $79.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4.0

JACK OF ALL TRADES

Good sound for a good price • Words: Ryan Taljonick

Today's gamers tend to rock a variety of devices, so it makes sense that headsets have evolved to accommodate our diverse tastes. At $80, Turtle Beach's Ear Force PX22, a set capable of PS3, Xbox 360, and PC gaming, is a decent wired all-in-one.

The audio quality here is really great, though I wish the bass had a bit more oomph. Still, footsteps, gunshots, and explosions rang loud and clear, and I never encountered any issues with clarity, regardless of high how I cranked up the volume.

Comfort, however, was a problem during extended play, as the breathable earcup padding became irritating after just an hour or two. I also found the length of the cord connecting the headset to the inline amp to be a tad too short; whenever I had the amp sitting on my desk, it often fell off if I moved my head too quickly.

So long as you don't mind a few minor inconveniences, though, the PX22 is as versatile and sturdy as they come in this price range.

01
HOOK UP
The PX22 hooks up to almost any device, including your PS3, Xbox 360, PC, and mobile hardware.

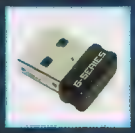
02
MIC ME
The boom mic is extremely flexible and sounds great. Plus, you can adjust chat volume independently of game volume—a huge plus.

LOGITECH G700S

Manufacturer: Logitech
www.logitech.com
Price: $99.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4.25

01 MACRO MASH
As with most gaming keyboards, the Apex Raw comes with a bunch of extra macro keys that are useful and easy to reach.



PLUG OPTIONAL
An included USB cord charges the G700s' battery and turns the device into a wired mouse when all else fails.

WIRELESS WONDERLAND

The G700s is a formidable cordless solution • Words: Ryan Taljonick

Fact: Cords are annoying. But if you do a lot of PC gaming, it can be hard to sacrifice an occasionally troublesome wire for a less accurate battery-powered device. Logitech's G700s, however, is the first wireless mouse to make me consider making the switch for good.

The G700s nails almost everything I look for in a gaming mouse: It's got an extremely comfortable ergonomic grip, plenty of programmable buttons, and onboard memory for storing custom macro profiles, which can be set using Logitech's intuitive software.

It's also incredibly accurate compared to other wireless mice I've tested, and its tiny USB transceiver can be stowed away in the battery compartment. Best of all, the battery isn't proprietary, meaning you can swap it out with any AA cell if need be.

It was a bit heavy for my liking, and its six-hour battery life couldn't carry me through marathon gaming sessions, but if you've been thinking of making the jump to a wireless mouse, the G700s is your best bet.

DECEIVINGLY BEAUTIFUL

The Apex Raw looks great, feels awful - Words: Ryan Taljonick

The greatest feature about SteelSeries' Apex Raw keyboard is easily its looks. The sleek design is sure to turn heads, and at first glance, the board has all the features a regular PC gamer could want: a suite of macro keys, adjustable backlighting, and "superior" anti-ghosting. But the second I started using it, I was immediately turned off.

The Apex Raw's rubber dome keys are modified to provide less resistance to the touch. In theory, this reduces your response time when playing such games as *League of Legends* or StarCraft. In practice, it means you'll likely press keys you didn't mean to, and having almost no resistance whatsoever makes for a rather awful typing experience.

The feature set is great for the money, and the Apex Raw has an undeniably sleek design. But you can get a keyboard with better keys and a few less bells and whistles for cheaper, while a few bucks in the opposite direction will score a sturdy mechanical option. As it stands, the Apex Raw is outclassed by most of its competitors.

STEELSERIES APEX RAW GAMING KEYBOARD

Manufacturer: SteelSeries
www.steelseries.com
Price: $69.99

OVERALL SCORE: 2.5

02 WRIST REST
The built-in wrist rest was uncomfortable during extended use and cannot be removed.

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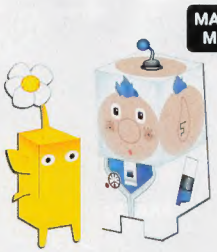
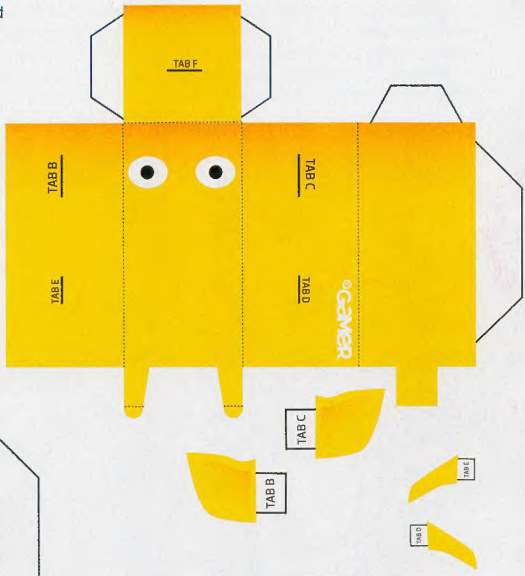
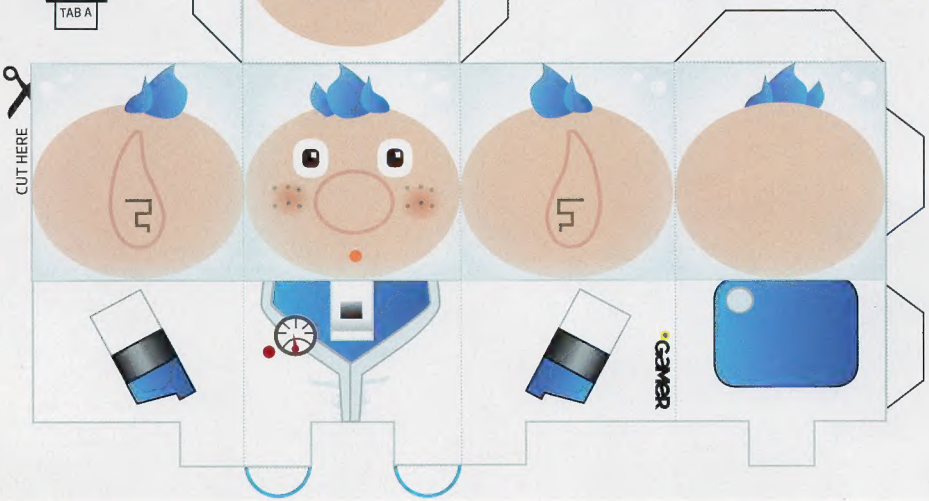
Design: Jillian Lungaro







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